

FAREWELL TO A SOLDIER

A Story

BY MARGARET T. QUINN

THE shaft of sunlight with its dancing pattern of dust struck across her closed eyelids. She frowned and turned her head irritably to evade its insistent light. But her consciousness had been aroused. She felt the discomfort of bone and flesh pressed overlong in one position. She flung out an arm, encountering the solid bulk of her husband beside her. With one movement she turned, her body fitting into the familiar curves of his. Without waking he accommodated his position to her nearness, bending his knee that her bent knee might rest against it, shifting his arm as her arm slipped over him. Thus full consciousness came to her, as on so many mornings in the past.

Her thoughts started their early morning review, yet behind them some heavy dread tugged at her memory. Something is going to happen to me today, she thought, something that has hung over me for a long time. Her thoughts darted here and there trying to find a solution. The sound of her husband's regular

breathing annoyed her. She wondered: how can he sleep like that while I lie here and worry? Wouldn't you think after all these years there would be some bond between us that would pull at his senses when mine are stirred? Fretfully she moved, hoping to waken him.

Then it came to her. He's going into the Army today! This very day! There will be no more looking ahead, first to a month, then to a week, then to three days, two days. It is here. And what am I feeling?

I must love him. Love, my God, what a word! When you are young you think it is something magical and mystical between two people. Then you meet somebody. Chance and circumstance combine to draw you together. You marry, hardly knowing why. Then you discover that if life is to be bearable you must learn the hardest lesson of all: to compromise with your ideals.

She reviewed her own bitter moments of disillusionment, seeking out the least forgivable aspects of Jim's

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character. There he lay beside her, insensitive as a clod of earth, now, on this morning, this last morning, before he leaves. Tears, always close to the surface, came into her eyes. Self-pity flooded her. . . . He doesn't love me enough, not in the way I want to be loved. What has he ever taught me of passion? He takes me quickly, as he takes his food, and when he has finished he is done with it . . . a weekly ritual, speechless and in the dark. . . . She repeated the phrase, struck with its poignancy. That's good, she thought. . . . My God what a monster of heartlessness I am! Today he leaves me — maybe forever! And here I lie, coining apt phrases as I draw up an indictment against *him* for coldness!

Then reaction took hold of her thinking. In remorse she rested her cheek against his back and kissed him softly. He was so good in so many ways, generous, oh, not only with money, but with — what was it? — his soul? He never held any of her petty angers against her. He seemed to be able, not so much to forgive them, as to wipe them from his mind. While she stored up in her memory every cause for grievance he had ever given her. Why, she could remember now things he had said or done that had hurt her eight, ten years back, oh, even before they were married. And she dragged them out whenever she wanted something to berate him with. In a burst of shame she admitted to herself: he is much bigger than I am.

The urgent ring of the alarm clock startled her. She jumped out of bed to turn it off, thankful that it had put a period to her thoughts. She turned from the bureau, and walked over deliberately to her husband's side. She stood, looking down at him, trying to fix indelibly in her memory the exact appearance he wore at that moment. She noticed the shape of his head, the relaxation of his features, the abandon of his sleeping body. For a long moment she regarded him . . . until he turned over on his back and opened his eyes.

II

"Did the alarm go off?" He seemed to find nothing strange in her position.

"Yes, dear, it's eight o'clock." She walked around the bed to her own side and got in. Don't say anything. Wait. He hasn't remembered yet. She lay quietly by his side in a turmoil of confused emotions. It seemed an endless time before he turned, and as he took her in his arms she knew he had remembered.

"How long have you been awake?"

"Not long. I only woke a little before the alarm rang." She was proud of the honest firmness in her voice, despite the tremor at the back of her throat.

Jim bent his head the better to see her face. He gave her a long look until his eyes struck up a shyness in her. To avoid them she put her arms around his neck and buried her face in its hollow. Thus they lay for a long

time, he saying nothing, an enigma to her as ever. What is he thinking? she wondered. She knew he was sorry for her, had a deep concern for her circumstances, but for their life together, their love, he had only a surface feeling. He lived his man's life. And now he was going out to a world of men in action. She knew he already felt a part of it, and, while he tried to hide it from her, was impatient of the delays before he could be gone. Oh, yes, he had been tender to her last night. She held closely the memory of each soft word, of every caressing gesture. But she wanted something more . . . greater assurance . . .

"It won't be long, sweetheart, before I'm home again. Only two months or so." He shook her gently to get some response.

"Yes, I know." She felt contemptuous of his feeble effort at consolation. Didn't he know what she wanted him to say? That he was mad about her, that he wouldn't know a happy moment till he was with her again. . . .

"What time is it, Jim?"

"Plenty of time," he said. "The train doesn't leave till ten-thirty. If we start at ten we'll be O. K. Listen, are you satisfied with everything? Sure you have plenty of money to hold you over? Did I do everything you wanted done?"

There he was, putting everything on a good, sound, material basis. These were the things that concerned him in relation to her: money, time, chores. Not her mind, or her heart, or her deep need for reassurance. . . .

Then a wave of regret hit her. Oh, for once in your life can't you forget about yourself? Think of Jim. Be gay. Kid him about the tough training, about having to do K. P. Make this morning a happy one, so that he'll take away with him the memory of your joyous comradeship.

She reached up and kissed him. "Everything's fine, Jim, and I have plenty of money. Don't worry about me. Just write to me often. Are you sure you'll get a leave in two months?"

"Well, that's what they promised."

"Then you'll be home in June."

"See, that's not so long. Then we'll have ourselves a vacation, go swimming, have picnics. Maybe we can bundle the kids off to Mother for a few days and take a little trip. Where would you like to go?"

"Oh, Jim, that's too far off. I can't think that far. I can't think past ten-thirty this morning."

He said nothing, but held her tighter. Then he released her, kissing her with a finality from which she could coax no comfort.

She got out of bed and walked over to the bureau, opened a drawer and selected fresh underwear. She heard him strike a match. His casual adherence to his regular morning habits infuriated her. There he lay, smoking a cigarette as if this morning were just like every other. She longed to lash out at him. Years ago she would have.¹

She put on her clothes quickly, knowing that his mind was far away from the white curves of her body.²

"Say, Nan, how about letting the

kids come in while you're getting breakfast?"

"All right, Jim. I imagine they're awake, anyway." She sat down at the dressing table to comb her hair. She saw how many more white hairs there were than when she had last noticed them. By the time he's back I may be white, she thought, and she saw a picture of herself walking to meet him with a young, happy face, and a beautiful blue-white hair-do.

She walked over to the closet and took her tan jersey off the hanger. She hated to get breakfast in it, but at the table this morning she wanted to look her best. She pulled on the dress, and smoothed it down over her hips. Out of the corner of her eye she saw that Jim was still placidly, at intervals, pulling on his cigarette. . . . Would I have been happier with another man? she wondered for a moment. What would it have been like being married to Stan? He was a heel, I suppose, but the things he used to say to me! They tore the heart right out of my body. She remembered one magical night — "to drink thy whole soul through thy lips, like sunlight drinking dew." He had quoted it easily, naturally. Not at all like Jim, who was embarrassed by the very word "poetry."

She sighed as she turned to leave.

"Haven't you got a kiss for a fella?" he pleaded.

At once her heart, confused but instinct with tenderness, turned over inside her body. She crossed to the bed and fell on her knees by Jim's side. Her

head on Jim's shoulder, her arms about his neck, she abandoned herself to a wild burst of tears. She knew her weeping dismayed him. He tried ineffectually to comfort her. He patted her back, pressed his lips to her head.

"Darling, it's not as bad as all that. Listen to me. I'll be coming home in a couple of months, and then we'll have a grand time. After the basic training I'll probably get leave every few weeks. And I'm too old for combat duty. I'll probably spend the duration in some God-forsaken camp somewhere in the sticks. Maybe we can even arrange it so that you and the kids can live nearby. Don't cry like that, sweetheart."

"Oh, I know you hate this sort of thing, Jim, but I couldn't help it. I'm O. K. now. I'll get the children up, and send them in to you." At the same time she suddenly became confused again with the feeling that he really didn't know all the reasons why she was crying . . . for unrealized dreams, for broken hopes, for loneliness . . .

III

She went out of the room and across the hall to the nursery. The children were awake, excited because the day promised them variety and departure from routine.

"Come on, kids. Hurry and dress, and you can go in to Dad till breakfast time." She kissed them each in turn and went over to the chest of drawers to assemble their clothes.

"What's for breakfast?" Johnny

wanted to know. He pulled his garments one by one from her hands, not willing to wait until they had been gathered together. Jimmy stood quietly by, content to watch her until his clothes had been handed to him. She noted again how different the two boys were. How was she going to handle these two personalities? Jim had arbitrated so many of their differences. His authority had always stood, firm and final, behind her. . . . But now?

"Mum, didn't you hear me? What are we going to have for breakfast?"

"Oh, a specially nice breakfast today. Sausages and eggs and muffins; everything you like. Now there are your things and be sure you hear me call, so that I shan't have to come up after you."

She walked downstairs thinking of the problem the children were going to be without Jim. She accused herself for the thousandth time. What a rotten mother I am! I don't deal with them consistently. I'm over-indulgent. But we do have good times.

She hurried about the task of getting the meal, a routine so familiar that it occupied only her hands.

How will the food at camp suit Jim? she wondered. He's used to carefully prepared meals, nicely served. And food means a lot to him. How she had resented that when she was first married! Oh, there were lots of things Jim was going to miss. He hadn't realized it yet. He was so absorbed with his dream of being a soldier, of having a part in the man's job of war.

. . . She didn't fool herself. She knew that Jim too had his dreams, many of them, perhaps like hers, unrealized. Well here he was, about to test the illusion of one of them.

She walked over to open one of the windows. The oven was making the kitchen uncomfortable. She stood a moment by the window, looking out over the fields. How thrilled she had been when they had first bought the farm! "Farm" . . . the very word had embodied a dream she had had since childhood. She had pictured herself in indestructible tweeds and stout oxfords, tramping the country with Jim beside her . . . until she found that she couldn't cajole Jim from his own garden.

Her roving eye lighted on the little stone house that was their nearest neighbor. She thought of its occupant, and as always the thought of him did something to her. It dissolved the years, and the children, and Jim. She was young again and on the make. She thought of all the stories she had read of seduction. Ye gods, the men she knew were all as monogamous as hell! . . . God, to be wanted again as a woman, an individual, and not as a mother, a cook, or a habit!

The doorbell rang and she remembered that she had told Jenny to come at nine o'clock. She probably wouldn't be able to afford Jenny now.

"See, Ah got heah on time, Mis' Mastahs."

"Yes, so you did, Jenny. Breakfast is about ready, too. I set the table last night, so all you'll have to do is to

take up the things. I'll call them."

She went past Jenny to the foot of the stairs. "Breakfast, boys." She raised her voice and called them a second time. She heard the thumps of a roughhouse going on in the bedroom. No use calling again. She'd have to go up.

She climbed the stairs irritably, and walked over to the doorway. She couldn't see Jim for the mad disarray of the bedcovers. The boys were trying wildly to pull him out of bed. She was ashamed because in her thoughts she had betrayed them. How horrified Jim would be if he knew what went on in her mind. In a nice sort of way, without being stuffy, he believed in all the American shibboleths: the sanctity of the home, the moral superiority of women. She could imagine no circumstances through whose force he would be unfaithful to her. She smiled inwardly, condescendingly, at his simplicity. He had no conception of her capabilities.

"Don't you people want any breakfast? Jim, you're not even dressed yet."

"Come on kids, or Mother'll skin us alive." Now he was playing the game of being just another naughty boy along with the children. How that annoyed her!

Jim grabbed his bathrobe, and, still roughhousing, the three of them ran downstairs. She stood still a moment, looking at the impression Jim's head had left on the pillow. When I get back, she thought, Jenny will have made the bed. I may never see that hollow shaped print again. . . .

By the time she reached the dining room they were waiting impatiently for her. Jenny brought in the fruit, and breakfast proceeded as on any other morning, the children monopolizing the scene. Today they were interested only in their father's life at camp. What kind of guns would he get? How long were the hikes? Would he live in a tent? She saw that Jim was enjoying himself, and she let them alone. Her own mind built up a romantic farewell. Perhaps just at the last moment, before he boarded the train, he would say something beautiful to her. He *had* said some nice things to her when they were first married. She recalled them wistfully: "I guess, Nan, this must be what they call ecstasy." . . . She was struck with the incongruity of her thoughts to the reality before her. She had to rouse herself as from a dream to shake them off.

"Jim, you'd better hurry and get shaved and dressed. I'll get the car out."

"O. K., Nan. Come on kids, you can come up with me if you behave yourselves."

She went out to the kitchen, taking her jacket from the closet as she passed. She walked out the back door to the barn. If she wanted a garden this year she was going to have to get at it right away. She surveyed the difficulties that she would have without Jim. I'll manage, though, she thought. Practical problems she could always solve. It was the emotional, the spiritual questions that defeated her.

She unlocked the barn door, got in the car, started it, and backed it out to the driveway. She sat in the driver's seat awhile, noticing the signs of spring in her garden: the willow tree with its fuzzy, green-gold circumference, the round, hard knobs on the dogwoods, the patches of incredible green that the garlic laid on the lawn. What would spring be like without Jim? They did work well together. . . . I'd better go in, and see what's keeping him. I'll bet he's lost something. She had started to get out of the car when he opened the door. The two boys ran out beside him. He picked each one up and hugged and kissed him soundly.

"Take care of Mother, now, and I'll see you in June."

IV

His trite words violated some sentimental necessity inside her. Well, what would you want him to do? she asked herself, weep all over them? She climbed back into the car. With a heave Jim threw his suitcase in the back, and took his place in the driver's seat. He started the car and drove off.

"I'm going to miss those two monkeys."

And what of me? Have you nothing to say to me?

"Yes, Jim, I think you will. I'm glad they're both at school."

"Nan, you must go into the city more often while I'm away. Leave the kids with Jenny and have some fun."

Fun, without a man!

"Oh, I'll be all right. The garden and canning will keep me busy all summer. I'm not going to look any further ahead than that."

"That's the spirit. Say, did you know they got Schmidt's boy in this draft? Wonder what the old man thinks about it. . . . Look at the cars!"

They had reached the little railroad station in Byerwood, and the circular driveway that skirted the tracks was crowded with cars. It seemed incredible that in that countryside so many families could be found with men of the necessary age and health to satisfy the army. Jim pulled up beside some forsythia bushes, and she put her arm out and touched their yellow petals. He reached over and took hold of her other hand as it lay on her knee. They sat there silently for a long time, but it was a comfortable silence, and for once she was content with it.

Jim looked at her long and intently. It was a look she never liked to meet. It shook the certainty of her estimate of him.

"We've gone through lots of experiences together, haven't we?"

"Yes, Jim, but I think this is the worst." . . . Is it? Remember the depression, when he was out of work? This wrench is nothing to the long, monotonous misery of those weeks.

She saw George Daniels heading over toward them. Don't come here, she begged. Jim had seen him too.

"Come on, Nan, let's get out. I'm not up to old George this morning."

They climbed out on the far side of the car, and walked over to the deserted end of the platform. The train was pulled up, and the engineer already raising steam.

She looked down along the platform at the scattered groups of people, each one with a youth at its center. She noticed an isolated couple close to them, a boy and girl, scarcely beyond high-school age. He had his arm around her, and his head was bent over hers. Nan thought of the boy, wounded, dying, of the girl getting a telegram. But, if you never come back to her, Nan told the boy in her heart, remember, "Forever shalt thou love, and she be fair." For Jim and me the magic is gone. My grief for him would not be whole or unalloyed. . . . And that seemed to her the most tragic element in this leave-taking. . . . Or, would I forget his inadequacies, as people seem to do of the dead? . . . Woman, this is the time to give, to be generous; not to hold out greedily for the satisfaction of your meanest instincts. . . .

"Jim, darling," she said, and she put her arms around him and laid her head on his shoulder. She felt his hesitation, and she smiled gently at it. She knew that embracing in public violated his deepest instincts. But when his arms did come round her she was conscious of the solid strength of his feeling for her. She knew that it had nothing to do with romance, or passion, or the ephemeral, surface aspects of their life together. It was compounded of troubles through which they had comforted each other,

of long, weary nights when they had lain wakeful beside each other, listening to the sick cries of one of the children, of sparkling days when they had worked side by side, making a home of the delapidated farm they had bought. And she thought, What is romance beside this feeling he has for me? A cheap thing that depends on moonlight and sexual potency. . . .

And even when, kissing her goodbye, he said, "See you in June," she felt no resentment against him. Yes, Jim, she thought, I shall see you in June. Maybe it will be June of another year. But whatever happens meanwhile can make no difference between us. You may come home with your strength broken. It won't matter. Not as it would to that boy and girl who have nothing as yet but their senses to hold them together. . . .

The train was now slowly pulling out of the station. She saw the young, laughing faces gathered at the windows. Why is it, she thought, that when they are young and confident of life's power to satisfy them they hold life cheapest; while the older men, who have learned that life is a delusion, are so reluctant to risk it?

She turned her back on the receding train. She walked over to her car, got in, started it, and drove away. She could not visualize Jim in a camp. She thought of him as eternally seated in a train speeding away from her. She tried to hold fast to the high level of her thinking, but, reluctant though she was, the old issues settled heavily on her heart.

YOU, TOO, CAN BE A LITERARY GENIUS

BY ADOLPH E. MEYER

IN days gone by if anyone yearned to devote his life to the writing of beautiful literature he always had to learn his craft the hard way. The road to the heights, as everybody knew, was long and steep, and it was also solitary. But today all this has been changed. Not only have the psychologists and pedagogues taken most of the rough spots out of the highway traversed by the literary apprentice, but cruising along its lanes are squadrons of experts who, for a fee, are always on duty to help a nascent man of letters to fame and fortune.

Some of them, known as Literary Counselors, run swanky offices, where for \$5 to \$25, they dispense personal advice to aspiring Conrads and Shelleys. Others, giving themselves even more unstintingly, operate special schools for that very purpose. Flourishing in every corner of the land, these range from modest one-man shrines to vast seminaries manned by large staffs of "highly paid experts" who, by mail, disseminate their instruction to thousands of literary novices at anywhere from \$25 to a couple of hundred dollars a head.

That the aims of literary counseling are high is plain. Says Melvin W. Chrissgau, B.C.S., B.S.L., and "counselor and advisor to the creative writer":

Everywhere there is growing evidence of America's unsatisfied hunger for finer literature, poems and stories that radiate man's nobility. . . . To meet this ever-rising demand great writers must be discovered and trained. . . . They can be found in millions of homes, in shops, in factories and offices. . . . Today they toil in the legion of silent and unknown men. Tomorrow they can be the world's most eloquent literary masters.

That this is not idle rhetoric has been proved by Brenda Ueland, author of *If You Want to Write*, and a Writer's Advisor of the first magnitude. After years of experimenting on "stenographers, housewives, salesmen, cultivated people, and little servant girls who had never been to high school," she was able to give the New Science its first and basic law, namely: "Everybody is talented, original and has something important to say."

As might be expected, a first-rate Literary Counselor must also be a first-rate Analyzer. Not only must he

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