

Jan Ewing

THE HATED ONE

When I first met Sergeant Stoe, my knees were shaking. I was standing before him, all six feet, two inches, and two hundred pounds of him. His sandy hair was cut very short, and his small blue eyes were set close together. When he spoke, he had the look of a bull ready to charge. For me it was a case of terror at first sight. He was explaining to me what my duties as an R.O.T.C. sponsor would be.

“Your main duty will be inspecting the troops every Friday. Now I don’t want to see a single cadet pass inspection for the first month,” he ordered. “If you can’t find at least one thing wrong with every boy, you are not doing your job as inspecting officer. Understand? Now about your uniform. It looks terrible. Next week when you come back, I want that white shirt spotless and I want your brass and shoes so shiny I can see myself in them. My sponsors are going to be sharp.”

He turned quickly and stalked out of the room. I just stood there for a few minutes, shocked by the abrupt “welcome” he had given me. Then I sank weakly into the nearest chair and tried to keep from crying. This was going to awful. How could he expect me to reach the standards he had set. It just was not possible!

Every Friday one of the cadets would escort me from class to the inspection. Every Friday I inspected the boys, torn between the knowledge that most of them looked perfect and my fear of what Sergeant Stoe would do if I passed any of them. Every Friday Stoe would be angry with me for something I had done wrong. Every Friday I swore I would quit my post, and every Friday I cried because of my frustration. I had shined my shoes and brass for two hours; my skirt had just been cleaned. Yet Sergeant Stoe was not satisfied.

Marching was even worse. We practiced on the football field for two hours every day, and then he would say we needed three hours more. He yelled and swore at us for a half hour every day after practice, and then the officers would have to stay for another half hour for more of the same.

After only a few weeks, I had made up my mind that the military was not for me. The cadets did not like me because I never passed anyone. Sergeant Stoe did not like me because he knew I wanted to give the boys good reports. I decided I could not take this constant battle any longer. We were to march in the Veterans’ Day Parade downtown in the beginning of November, and then I would tell

Stoe I was dropping out.

The day of the parade was cold and wet. We waited in the rain for almost two hours before the parade began, and we had to stand in formation at attention or parade rest at all times. There was absolutely no moving around, so everyone felt like frozen lumps. Our eyes were weary and our noses were red from the cold, and the only sound throughout the troops was an occasional sniff or a cough. I was inwardly hating Sergeant Stoe every minute, and I was determined to show him that *I* was not cold, that *I* could take the rain, that *I* could outmarch any other girl in the city.

Sergeant Stoe left to be seated in the reviewing stand, and I began to visualize what would happen when my unit walked by. The instructors from the other schools would say, "My, that girl certainly carries herself well. What a proud, military bearing she has. She must be at least a major." Sergeant Stoe would, of course, have to tell them I was only a second lieutenant, but he would begin to think about how valuable I was. He would realize the corps would just collapse without me, and he would begin to appreciate all I'd done for him. Then when I turned in my resignation, he would beg me to stay. I would show him! My chin went up a little higher with every thought of how I would get back at him.

Finally the parade began, and we were moving down the street. It was no trouble for me to keep "head and eyes straight forward" because I was watching for the reviewing stand and my hated enemy. As we marched past the stand, all the troops had to salute and look to the right because of the many military officers who were being honored. During this "eyes right" I looked straight at Sergeant Stoe, ready to knock him over with my haughtiness. My eyes nearly fell out when I spotted our sergeant, eyes shining with tears, beaming at our snappy unit. The pride that was evident in him absolutely glowed, and I could tell he was thrilled with our performance.

As the parade drew to an end, I was confused. Why would a man as cold and as rough as he actually cry just because his cadets were in step? When the answer dawned on me, I almost laughed aloud. Sergeant Stoe wasn't cruel after all. His gruff treatment of us was only to make us determined to prove our military abilities to him. Being fired with this determination, we had won first place in the parade for having the best unit. Everyone said, "Just wait till that parade. We'll show him!" We had "shown him," and that was just what he wanted us to do. His strategy worked perfectly.

When Sergeant Stoe walked back from the reviewing stand, the tears were still in his eyes. He shook the hand of every cadet and every sponsor, about one hundred-fifty in all, and when he finished his only words were, "You guys sure put on a hell of a show."

Karlis E. Rusa

THOUGHT-SHIPS

a prose poem

Often it is that strange and beautiful ships are seen to put in at a certain vast port; they are bright argosies that come gliding from the unseen horizon on days which are as songs of azure and gold. The sea then is of lavender, and reflects the mellow skies where burns the never-consumed sun. And the argosies have sails for the most part dazzling white, or of varied joyous colors, and perhaps some that are as the raiment of Harlequin. And on these merry ships are borne ancient chests of spices from sunken worlds, and thousand-faceted gems whose brilliance makes men laugh in glee, and unknown instruments that can play rare music, music arousing suppressed feelings in those who hear. But ever and anon, when the port sleeps a heavy and drugged sleep in the sultry glare of day, the argosies of mirth enter it in vain; for then there is no one on the wharves to unload the graceful vessels, and they must depart the way they came.

And there are times when other ships come roaring swiftly and ominously from the unseen horizon, and they come unbidden on nights that are stormy and wild. Blackly monstrous and ungainly are these ships, and their dark sails, whipping and fluttering in ghastly winds, are tattered and ragged. Like fierce dragons, the demonic vessels are swept over the wharves by the shrieking storm, and rage high above the cowering city ere they plunge downward to wreak ruin and woe. Then they vanish, as ghosts, but leave horror in their wake.

For the vast are rick and sereve; and the grim eldrieh ships are my thoughts that port is my mind, and the graceful argosies are my thoughts that bring grief and fear to me, and I would gladly reject them. . . .