



JOEY

Marjorie Snodgrass

She looked down fondly at her six foot, three inch son, lying quietly for a change, oblivious of her presence.

"Oh, Joey," she thought, "how could you have grown so big in seventeen years?" His large-boned frame, broad shoulders, long muscular arms and legs awed her somewhat. She remembered the days, still clear in her mind, when she held her first born in her arms to comfort or feed him. Now, she tried to recall the last time she had picked him up, or rocked him in the night. "How many years has it been since I held you?" she mused, wondering where the years had gone.

As she glanced down at the large, calloused hands, clean of the usual motorcycle grease, a faint smile rose to her lips as she remembered his once small, pudgy fingers patting her mouth when she sang to him and his strong grasp around her little finger when he was not quite ready to let go and walk on his own.

"God, how I miss you, darling Joe!" she grieved silently, her thoughts turning to her husband. "I need you so much! And the kids . . . why the twins can't even remember you." Noting the resemblance once more between this nearly grown son and his missing father, she reflected, "Maybe we expected too much from Joey. I don't know. When you left for Vietnam he was terribly proud of you, Joe. He tried so hard to fill your shoes. He wanted you to be proud of him. But that lasted only a few months before all the fighting began and then the trouble with Sister Margaret at school. But he did try. Oh, yes, he did try these past five years."

When she gazed down at his dark, wavy hair, so much like his dad's, she felt tempted to run her fingers through it. But, she did not want to disturb him. What would Joe have thought of his son's long hair? And what would he have said about his son wearing beads, for heaven's sake? Staring at them briefly, she shifted her eyes to his slightly protruding Adam's apple. Wouldn't Joe have been surprised to hear that deep bass voice? What a spring it had been, when Joey's voice changed! At first,

she just thought he had had a cold. Then Father O'Regan called to say he couldn't sing with the boys' choir for Easter. It was just a week later that the official telegram from Washington arrived.

"It's been so hard on the kids, too, Joe," she complained, as tears welled into her eyes. "Joey was so angry when you were killed. He wanted to enlist right then, at age fourteen, no less! What a kid!" A year later, she had realized his anger had gone, to be replaced by a quiet resignation. Gone, too, was his joy in playing baseball or even in telling jokes. Not that he didn't rebel . . . that's when he let his hair grow and began to work for peace.

"Mom! Mom!" fifteen year old Maureen called, somewhat urgently. "Just a moment more," she replied, remarking to herself, if it isn't one kid it's another. She felt strange looking down on this nearly grown son, him unaware and all. But, it was always so different when those steady, blue eyes were open. Joe had said they were too blue for a boy and too pretty with such long, black lashes. How his eyes did reflect his moods! Why, ever since he was a baby she could tell at a glance whether he felt full of mischief, or anger, joy or grief.

"Mom, come here!" now the other two girls, Peggy and Kathy called to her. Reluctantly, she decided she had better put an end to this peaceful moment full of memories. It had been good just looking at Joey, not shouting, not arguing, just feeling a deep love for him. "Yes, Kevin, I'm coming. Don't pull on me so." She spoke quietly to one of the twins taking the other boy's hand, too.

As she crossed the room, she reached up to pull the black veil over her face at the precise moment she heard the click of the coffin lid closing. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she thought of the child which had come from the love she and Joe felt as newlyweds. Her body shook, wracked with sobs, as she drew farther from the once tiny body she had nourished within herself, flesh of her flesh.

"Oh, dear God, forgive him," she prayed fervently, "he didn't mean to take so much. I just know it was a foolish mistake." And she sat down with her remaining five children, not hearing the priest's voice, not seeing the shiny coffin, banked with flowers, trying not to remember this part of Joey's abbreviated life, this ending of so much of her own life, a part she had loved so much.