There's a Soldier

DONNA HOFFMAN

As the piercing north wind blew his icy gusts around the corners and swept the streets with his broomlike blasts, the people stamped their feet and drew their coats more closely about them. It seemed as though Wind and Sun were having a terrible argument and Wind was doing his utmost to win this battle. The crowd was beginning to lose a little of the feverish excitement that a military parade always seems to cause. Suddenly the strains of the national hymn were carried to their ears; and, forgetting the cold, the crowd cheered and sang as the band marched into sight. What a day for a parade! What a day for fighting; it seemed almost a Russian day!

Little Jimmy hopped up and down excitedly as he heard the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching feet. "Here they come!" he shouted. "Man! Look at those guns!" (Gee, if only I were in Brother Danny's shoes, I'd show those Japs a thing or two! Wish I were a soldier, but Mom says I'm too little to fight. She says that I can help stop up the hole in the dike by putting my dimes into war stamps. Well, that's something, but I do wish I could wear a uniform and carry a gun like Danny. There he goes now!) "Hey, Danny! Over here we are! D'ja see 'em, Mom? Gosh, isn't he swelle-gant lookin', huh?" (Maybe I'll look like him some day — tall and stern — marching with that carefree swing. Gosh.)

Down the block they come, smiling at the cheers from their people. Tall, short, thin and muscular, blond and brunette and red head — all just boys, but marching on toward the brink of manhood, their childlike qualities giving way to the grim, determined expressions of men who have something to accomplish.

Leaning heavily on his cane, Phillip Worth searched the young, hopeful faces of youths who were leaving behind them the comforts and fellowship of home and loved ones just as he had done in 1917. "I feel so old," he thought, "and so helpless." Sighing deeply, he remembered Armistice Day, and again he heard the cheers and singing of a different crowd — a happy, thankful, hopeful people. Then he had believed there would be no more wars for America. Then he had dreamed of having a son who could live in a peaceful, loving world — a son who would not have to endure the scarring agony of seeing bullet riddled bodies, helpless and squirming from pain, the screams and cries of children and women and old men. He had dreamed of a mankind constructive and not destructive — a people who would turn from hate and selfishness, from lust and greed to a universal brotherhood of kindness. What good dreaming? What good if a man dream ideals impossible to attain when other men were continuing to dream as of old. "Oh, my boys," he muttered under his breath. "God grant it will not be in vain. God give us the wisdom to keep it from being in vain." Shivering, he turned and limped through the throng unmindful of the tears slipping down his cheeks. He brushed past a young, lovely girl who was eagerly scanning the lines of marching soldiers. A picture flashed through his mind. Again he saw Lilian as she fluttered a gay handkerchief toward where he had stood on the deck. She had waited, just as this lovely girl would wait — a time lost out of their lives. It would be a time always lost which could never be made up . . . . . .

Jeanne's eyes darted to and fro over the lines of tramping soldiers. Don had
told her to stand on their corner where he
couldn’t miss seeing her. “This may be the
last time I ever see him.” Her heart felt
laden at the thought. “Maybe he will find
someone else where ever he’s sent. Maybe
— O, stop this nonsense,” her head ordered.
“It isn’t as bad as all that.” There he is!
He sees me! How brave and strong and
determined he is! They’re singing, Keep
the Home Fires Burning. I will, Don. I
hope it won’t be long. I’m so proud of you,
dear. I know you’ll do your best—a
splendid best. Why is it men like you must
sacrifice careers and futures because of the
selfishness and arrogant superiority of men
who destroy all that is light and good in
the world? What right and through what
power can men make mankind squirm and
be smashed to pulp under their heels? But
I must be gay and laugh and hold my chin
up. Moping is no good, you said. “Good
bye! Good luck.”

“Huh, they’re suckers to leave girls
like that one behind,” sneered Moore as he
leaned carelessly against the flag pole and
watched Jeanne’s goodbyes. “Well, I’ll not
be caught keeping time to that kind of
rhythm. Dad can take care of that. He
knows all the ropes. They act so important
and big. Think because they wear uniforms
that they own the country. Well, it’s their
battle, not mine. Let them fight it. Some
day they’ll wake up to the fact that it isn’t
all just cop and robber play. Jeepers, she’s
some gal! I think I’m going to enjoy being
left behind.”

As the parade moved farther from
sight, Mother Pierce whispered a motherly
“God bless you, my sons.” Whisking the
tears from her eyes, she smiled up at
Father. “There they go—the last of the
Pierces. The twins have grown up.” Her
proud head nodded. “I could almost see
them grow from the boys who used to
scuttle from my pantry with cookies filled
pockets, to grown men who on accepting
their inheritance, are going to see that
inheritance preserved for all. They’ll do
it, too. They and all the other mothers’
sons. They have the lives of great Ameri-
cans before them to live up to, and they’re
not going to let them down. It will seem
lonesome, though. Home will be so empty
— Goodness, it’s cold today. Let’s hurry
home.”

The Wind, in its frigid determination,
was still sweeping the earth with shivery
gusts. Bits of paper and confetti were toss-
ing and blowing in the deserted streets. No
marching feet were treading time to the
national anthem now. No crowds were
thrilling to the strains of the great song of
their land. They had scattered to warm
homes to write cheery notes to men who
had left home to keep their freedom. The
wind and the gathering dusk reigned over
the deathlike stillness of the empty streets.
WHALER AND FISHING VESSELS

BY Wm. Bradford

John Herron Art Museum
VERONA, ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH

BY SAMUEL PROUT

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