

Duty To My Country

By Jane Watson

Dave sat down at the typewriter and stared into the dark room a moment trying to think of how to begin the letter. He could make out no distinct object in the darkness, but he heard the clock ticking in military precision. Rain was dripping in the gutter pipe outside the window rhythmically—left—right—left—right—forward march—left—right. Dave thought about turning on the radio softly to shut out these sounds. It was time for "Music in the Night". Then he thought about the boy on duty sitting at the end of the hall under the one bare, cold neon tube. He couldn't risk any more demerits. Last week he had kept night watch. He remembered sitting in the straight chair facing the long hall, lighted only by the tiny night lights along the floor.

He liked to sit and imagine how some night when he was on duty, he would leave the desk and walk down the hall. It would stretch farther and farther away and he would walk until the desk glaring under the bare neon tube would fade and vanish. Still he would walk. The night lights would become brighter and brighter and soon he would close his eyes, dazed, always walking. When he opened them, he would find a new world, and he would be free. Dave frowned and decided to risk the demerits. He flipped the radio switch and turned it down low 'til the buzzing was replaced by smooth soft music. Dave leaned back in his chair and smiled. To hell with demerits. He imagined what would happen if the boy on duty heard. "On my honor as a West Point cadet—" He would be reported—"Duty to God and my country"—"God", and Dave thought of marching into chapel and reciting the Cadet's Prayer—"my country"—Dave dropped the front legs of his chair back onto the floor with a thud and sat up straight, remembering, staring into the darkness.

"Duty to my country," that's what his older brother had said seven years ago. Dave had watched Tom all during church that morning. The whole family was sitting as usual in the pew next to the window in the grey stone Episcopal church—Mom and Dad, then Ann and Tom sitting very close together, then Dave. But when the opening hymn was announced, Tom hadn't moved to open a book for Ann. He looked straight ahead, not seeming to hear. Dave thrust his hymnal over and Tom jumped, startled. He stared at the page a moment before he grinned and whispered, "Thanks". During the sermon, Tom stared out of the window. There was no trace in his eyes of the teasing glints Dave knew so well. Dave wondered and started to pinch his leg—Tom hated that—but for some reason he didn't. Reverend Cains began the prayer, "Lord, be with the boys in Germany—" Tom whispered something to Ann. As she put her hand on his knee, the sun reflected prisms of light from her wedding rings.

At dinner that day while Mom and Ann were clearing away the dishes for dessert, Tom had said suddenly that he believed he'd join the Army. Ann kept on stacking plates, but Mom had sat down quickly. She and Dad tried to talk him out of it. Ann kept scraping the plates. It was then he'd said something about duty to his country. Dave had sat silent wishing he were old enough to go and forgetting how he hated being called Tom's "kid brother" and the "baby".

Tom came home on leave before

he went overseas. Dave remembered how straight he was in his khaki uniform as he jumped off the early morning train steps. Dave held out his hand awkwardly. "Good to see you, Tom."

Tom grasped his hand tightly and mumbled something in reply keeping his other arm about Ann's waist, looking at her.

That evening when Dave came home from school he found Tom alone in the living room sitting in the stuffed chair by the fireplace. The grey half-light of dusk smoothed away harshness and Dave thought Tom was smiling.

"Where's Ann?"
"She took Mom to the grocery store."
"You by yourself?"
"Yeah."

Dave walked over to the fireplace and turned suddenly to face Tom.

"Tell me about it."
"What?"

"I mean how it—being in the army—feels, you know."

"Right now after a train trip from camp, it feels tired."

"Are you tired all the time, Tom?"

"No, back at camp I'm just—bored."

"Aw Tom, I'm serious. Don't you remember how you talked before you left—duty, and all that?"

"Yeah, I remember." Tom's voice dropped.

Car lights flashed in the driveway and Ann yelled for help in carrying in the groceries. Dave never talked to Tom alone again.

After he went back to camp, his letters to the family came from across the Pacific. He wrote about being hungry when the supply headquarters sent only heavy artillery which couldn't be used in the hills. He complained about Roosevelt's giving half of eastern Asia to the Russians and splitting up Korea at Yalta, but he never mentioned duty again.

When the telegram came, Dave had been in the living room writing the valedictory speech for high school graduation. His mother was clattering with Sunday night supper in the kitchen, and Dad was re-reading the morning paper. Ann answered the door bell. When he heard her very quickly thank the

messenger, he stopped writing and waited. She walked into the room, and he knew. Before long the gold star had been put away, Dave had entered Georgia Tech, and Ann had gone to work in the newspaper office.

The radio announcer read an advertisement to the dark room and Dave heard the clock ticking in military precision.

It was during his first Christmas vacation from Tech that he had announced his intention to try for an appointment to West Point. Ann had dropped in that night with the new managing editor to wish them Merry Christmas. When he finished telling of his decision, Ann was watching him intently.

"Don't do it, Dave. You weren't cut out for Army life."

Dave looked at her resentfully. "How do you know? And what do you know about Army life?"

"I knew Tom."

Dave saw the managing editor sitting beside her and staring at the floor. "It seems that you might have forgotten Tom."

Ann reddened. "No, I haven't forgotten him. Perhaps we'd better go now, Ed."

Dave snapped off the radio announcer's voice and typed Dear Ann at the top of the page, he stopped. It had begun to rain harder.

He remembered the next time he had seen Ann. It was during his summer leave after his first year at West Point. He hadn't wanted to go to her house after she had announced her engagement to the managing editor, but his mother had told him he should.

Her house was quiet with the Sunday afternoon hush. It was like walking into a cave to leave the glittering pavement and enter the rather dark, high-ceilinged room. The wallpaper was a hazy mixture of taru flowers on a grey background. The ruffled white curtains wavered slightly with the breeze. Across the street someone had turned on the N. B. C. symphony.

Dave threw his hat on the chair by the doorway and turned to watch Ann coming downstairs. She crossed the room and held out her hand. It was small and cold in Dave's.

All Is Calm

By Cynthia May

The night is dark. The crescent moon hangs low. The black horizon is tinted with pastel shades from the city below.

The air is still. We mortals lie asleep.

From somewhere a gentle breeze stirs and whispers in the trees. The breeze grows stronger.

The night is no longer quiet. The trees form ghostly arches bent

by the terrible force of the wind. The world is aghast.

A terrifying fear has struck the awakened.

The gale is at its peak and all is a rushing, threatened turmoil.

The night is dark.

The crescent moon hung low,

And all was calm before the dawn.

taught me not to admit a mistake. I have to believe in something now.

What—

Dave ripped the paper from the typewriter and crumpled it viciously. He walked across the floor towards his bed bumping into the wastepaper basket. "Damn," he muttered. He lay down on his bed and listened to the rain drumming on the roof. Perfect marching time—left—right—

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