

GALLANTRY ON THE HOME FRONT

The telegraph boy stood at the gate sorting out the messages from the War Department. The top one, that was for Mrs. Atworth. Why, she had already received two within the last month. Surely this must be good news; a nice woman like her would never be asked to suffer the loss of her three sons in one war. Well, she may as well get it now as later.

"Why, hello, Mike! Are you back again? Not another telegram. I was expecting Randy home from overseas for a month's furlough; it must be from him. Will you read it to me? I broke my glasses this morning and can't read a word without them."

"Sure ma'am. It says. . . . 'The War Department regrets to. . . He was fatally wounded on his last flight over enemy territory before his furlough came due. . . .' Now, now, don't cry Mrs. Atworth. Randy said that he would sooner be killed fighting for his country than see it conquered by Hitler. He often told me that someone had to die in this war and that it may as well be he. . . Now please don't cry. Randy said he wanted you to be brave if anything should happen to him; he wanted you to feel proud of him. Do you remember the second last day he was home? Remember seeing him call me in and talk to me? Do you want to know what he said?"

"Yes, Mike. Please tell me. He was the baby of our family and I loved him so much that anything you can tell me will be cherished forever."

"He said to me. . . 'Mike boy, I know you're grieving because you were turned down for army service. But what could a slightly crippled fifteen year old boy like you do in the big show where every move means death to you or to someone else. Lads like you are needed here where there are many many jobs that only you can do. Yes, we are the men who do the fighting and get all the glory, but it is the boys like you who can't get into it that really win the wars. You see, wars cannot be won unless there are men on the home front to keep the army supplied with materials. Men cannot do their best work if they are brooding over their failure or inability to get into the armed

forces. Here is where you come in mike. You realize that one need not be an actor or a movie star to be a morale builder. The best morale builders are right in our midst. You, with your Irish tongue, heart, and spirit, are a natural morale builder. Your job is to keep yourself in circulation when you are not working. Your duties—to squelch ugly rumors at birth, to encourage “C-3’s” in their work, that is, to tell them how important they are over here and make them believe it, to visit the worried mother of a soldier whenever possible, to entertain lonely soldiers on leave with no one to visit in this big city, to do your best to keep other kids your age out of trouble, to keep them out of beer parlors and away from bad companions, and, in general, to do your utmost to keep the Home Front happy. You are old enough to understand why we are fighting; that it is to protect our loved ones at home, that they may be safe from oppressors like Hitler, that they may be able to live in a free nation, a nation like the one for which we fight today. You realize that a soldier cannot fight his best if he thinks all is not well at home, if he thinks there is discontent. The best way to prevent his thinking this is to keep everything going well at home.

‘This is your job and it is a job you can do if you stop brooding over the fact that you were turned down, and get to work.

‘I mentioned that you should visit mothers with sons in the service. That is the first job of the morale builder. Mothers are continually writing their soldier sons telling them how much they worry about their safety. I want you to visit these mothers and encourage them to hope for the best, remind them that not all soldiers are casualties, in fact a good number of them return as sound as they were the day they went away.

‘Some day you will deliver a telegram from the War Department to a mother along this very street. It may be to my mother, and I would have it to mine rather than to any other. That telegram will inform her that her son is missing in action. She will cry and wonder why it had to be her son. You, if you are the kind of boy I think you are, will stay and encourage her. You will tell her that her boy, along with many others, is happier in making the supreme sacrifice than he would be if he had returned

and all his buddies had laid down their lives; that he wanted to lay down his life for her and for all those dear to her to prove his love for them, in order to make the world a decent place to live in once more, and in order to save future generations from having to fight another war in their time. Tell her this and punctuate it with your own thoughts.

'I know you can be trusted to do what I have asked, Mike, for you are a born soldier. Do what I have asked of you, and you will merit the highest award a soldier can receive; you will be a soldier your country may well be proud of. . . .'

"That is what your son told me, Mrs. Atworth. So you see you have a son of whom you may well be proud, of whom the whole nation may well be proud."

"Thank you very much, Mike. What you have told me means more to me than you can imagine. You may go now, for I see you have a good deal of work to do. But please call back real soon, won't you?"

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"Hello Mrs. Atworth."

"Why hello, Mike. Where have you been for the last two weeks? I haven't seen you around at all."

"No, I haven't been around. I just had a vacation and a trip to see the Governor-General. Do you see this little blue ribbon with the gold Maple Leaf on it? Well, they gave it to me and said it was for 'Gallantry on the Home Front.' They said that some woman who lost three sons in this war wrote them and told them about me. I don't know what she told them, though."

"Well I wonder who that could have been."

—John Eldon Green, '47