

The Horrible After-Effects of Army Life

How the Dire Results of the Routine and Discipline Almost Wrecked the Home of Private McBuggs

I.

Private McBuggs swung off the train with his suitcase in his hand. Stealthily he looked up and down the platform.

It was late at night.

Private McBuggs hadn't notified his family of his home-coming. The effects of army life were still so deep in his soul that he at once began to plan to slip into the house without being seen.

He sneaked up a side street.

"Can I get by the guards?" he asked himself.

He went up the little lane through the back way, past the barn. He remembered the barn all right. That was the spot where his father first applied home discipline to him, although, to be sure, the barn itself wasn't the exact physiological spot of the application.

In Through a Window.

Climbing through a window, Private McBuggs found nobody astir in the house. He forgot that the house was only an old residence in which lived his mother, father, sister, brother, and Aunt Myra, a maiden lady much given to music and mustard plasters.

He crept upstairs. "I musn't let the corporal get anything on me."

In his bedroom he found a big white bed. It was just as he had left it. He stared at it curiously. "I wonder what that's for!"

He prepared to bunk on it for the night anyway. A moment later he must have thought he was a sergeant, for he took his pocket flashlight and started along the corridor of bedrooms.

"I gotta take check roll-call," he muttered, opening the door to Aunt Myra's room.

He bent over the bed and took hold of the covers. "All present or accounted for?"

His flashlight revealed a struggle beneath the sheets and Aunt Myra's face sticking up, horror-stricken.

"Help!" she screamed. "Burglars! Help! Police! Murder!"

Private McBuggs fled back to his room. He heard sounds of the household moving about excitedly and his father at the telephone waking police headquarters out of a sound sleep.

"Gee!" McBuggs dived into bed. "I'd better lie low. They're calling out the guard."

II.

Private McBuggs woke early the next morning—at six o'clock, to be exact. He fancied that he heard dying out the last notes of reveille. He jumped out of bed and, tightening his belt, ran out to the street, still gray before dawn.

In front of his house he fell into alignment with the street car tracks and stood at attention. Strange! He saw no other soldier out yet, except the captain, who as a matter of fact was the cop on the beat, looking at him queerly.

"Yez can't be after takin' a car on this line, can yez?"

McBuggs saluted him.

"Sir, the company is formed."

"Go on, ye h'athen, the company wint into bankruptcy last August."

McBuggs saluted again and went back to his room. He washed in a tumbler of water he found in the hall and wiped his face on the bedstead. Then he went to mess. In the dining room he found the other members of the family.

He Meets His Family.

They stared at him dumbfounded, and then pounced upon him. He received their greetings as in a daze. "Well, sonnie," said his father finally, "let's sit down and eat breakfast." His father and mother started forward to their chairs, but Private McBuggs stopped them with a shout.

"Hey! Get back there! The mess line forms behind me. Whaddya trying to do—slip somethin' over me?"

The family looked at him aghast. They managed to get through breakfast, however. Then Private McBuggs took up his dishes and started for the kitchen.

"Where in hell's the hot water? Who's on kitchen to-day?"

Nora, the cook, dropped a plate in the excitement.

"Come on, you rummies!" cried McBuggs. "Let's go back and get the place ready for inspection."

He went to his room and began laying out everything on the bed. His sister came to the door, amazed.

"Go out and police the street," he told her. "Get all those cigarette butts in front of the door, and hurry up. Shake a leg!"

III.

The family was assembled in the parlor, discussing the strange case of their soldier boy.

"Jim says such irrational things," complained his mother. "Do you suppose his mind has become unsettled from camp life? He just passed my door as I was lying down, and he told me to 'cut out that bunk fatigue.' What in the world does it all mean?"

"I give it up," replied Mr. McBuggs, pacing the floor anxiously. "He told me to go out and get busy on the Incinerator. He must have forgotten that our car is a Ford."

"Well, I guess we'd better—s-s-s'h, here comes Jim now!"

He Seems to Get Worse.

Private McBuggs stood in the doorway. His voice was loud and firm.

"This squad's going on guard to-night, and I don't want any o' you boobs reporting for guard mount with dirty guns or equipment. Don't you know how to stand at attention yet?" This to his father who was fidgetting from one foot to the other. "Keep those hands at your side. Quit scratching your nose! You'll poke your eye out."

He turned around and strode out. A death-like silence fell upon the group. Aunt Myra began to weep. Nobody moved. Only the fuzzy little dog, Hortense, the pride of Mrs. McBuggs' heart, seemed not to realize the awful crisis that hung over the household. Hortense wagged her tail as usual.

IV.

Later in the afternoon Private McBuggs blew a blast on his whistle and summoned the family to assembly on the veranda.

"Comp'nee, a-ten . . . shun!"

As he gave the order his mother and father and aunt and sister stood up as erect as they could; yet they were seized with fear and trembling.

"I have decided," announced Private McBuggs, "to pitch pup tents on the tennis court."

Mrs. McBuggs let out a scream. She made a lunge and gathered up the fuzzy little dog, Hortense, into her arms. She murmured to it hysterically: "No, no, Hortense! He shan't harm you."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Mr. McBuggs.

"Matter? Didn't you hear what Jim said. He said he'd 'pitch pup Tense on the tennis court.' Oh, what a brute my son has become!"

V.

It was not until evening that peace settled over the household. And that was only brought about by Mr. McBuggs commanding his son to go to sleep in the bath-tub full of water. Then Private McBuggs felt perfectly at home!

—C. D.

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