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A Little Tin Soldier

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Lydia M. Dunham O'Neil.

The buff brick buildings of the New Mexico Military Institute stand solemnly on the mesa, their outlines clear and beautiful against the cloudless skies. The notes of the bugle echo sweetly through the golden air; reveille, when the mocking-birds carol a greeting to the dawn; taps, when the twinkling white stars and the great glowing planets shine down upon the little city nestling contentedly in the Pecos Valley.

The stars and stripes wave high, and the drums throb jubilantly; and the routine, from reveille to taps, goes endlessly on, day after day. Sweet is the call of the bugle, and stirring the throb of the drum; and stately are the boyish cadets in their gray uniforms, as they march in parade or review.

Yet one face, on which the white stars shone so tenderly a year ago, no longer dimples the snowy pillows at the sound of taps; one slender form, which marched in parade with so much dignity and precision, is missing now from the ranks of gray-suited, white-belted cadets; one pair of deep blue eyes, which gazed so carefully along the rifle at target practice, and supplemented the instructions in astronomy with private observation of Canopus and Aleyone, are closed forever on a far-off field.

Perhaps his name is seldom mentioned in Hagerman Barracks, or on the campus; perhaps he is already half-forgotten; for new faces come, and old faces go, as come and go the seasons. But down in the town his picture, framed in ebony, hangs upon a wall; and before it, as before a shrine, a girl weeps or prays or dreams, mourning the slender, sunny-haired lad whom she called her little tin soldier. Nor is her grief the less poignant because she knows that the young warrior was awarded the highest honor that Britain can bestow upon her sons—the Victoria Cross, with its solemn words, "For Valour." Valor and glory mean nothing to her, save that they are words associated with War; and that War has claimed as one of its victims Norval Kingsley, late a Roswell cadet.

Laurel Devoy had met him first at the sheep-ranch of his uncle, a quiet little Scotchman, in the northern part of the state. The young English lad was so very different from all the other boys she had ever known, that Laurel could not help becoming interested in him, and despite their many dissimilarities and differences of opinion, the two became good comrades.

By and by he came down to Roswell, to enter the Institute; and the very first Saturday afternoon following, he used his weekly leave to call on her, to renew their acquaintance, and to acquaint her with all his impressions of the institute, the faculty, and his fellow cadets. She was glad to see him, and welcomed him heartily; and thereafter he called regularly every Saturday afternoon.

He was a thoroughly boyish lad, and enjoyed to the utmost the tennis and ball games and all the other sports that enliven the days of the cadets. Yet he seemed to take himself and the world rather seriously, and more seriously still he regarded England and The Army. Norval did not spell "the army" with capital letters, but he thought and spoke as if he did, and it was just one of his little ways that endeared him and made him so amusing to Laurel Devoy.

Laurel was a thoroughly democratic American girl, and she tried very hard to convince him that he exaggerated the importance of kings and castles and colonies; but while he admitted that Americans were a jolly good sort, and the country itself really remarkable, years of conservative training and generations of hereditary influence were of more effect than Laurel's eloquence or pretty pouting.

Laurel spoke easily of "the King" or "the Prince of Wales," to Norval they were "His Majesty" or "His Highness," and when Laurel said "Lord Roberts" or "Lord Kitchener," Norval spoke of "His Lordship" with the utmost reverence, coupled with keen admiration for such famous representatives of The Army.

And when Norval confided to her, one day, his intention of enlisting and of going to India, and his hope of innumerable promotions and perhaps, some day, of meriting the Victoria Cross, she laughed merrily and dubbed him her little tin soldier.

"And," he added, smiling at her banter, "when I get a captaincy, then we can be married."

"We?" queried Laurel.

"Yes—you and I."

"But I'm an American," she told him,—"A Yankee, through and through. My ancestors fought your ancestors, you know, and I couldn't contemplate such a thing as marrying an Englishman."

"No?" he replied easily. "Why, if I were a girl, I'd rather marry a British soldier than anyone else on earth!" And so far as he was concerned, that appeared to settle it.

One day in May he told her that he and his uncle had planned to visit their people in England and Scotland, just as soon as the term at the Military Institute was ended. It was then, when each day brought their separation nearer, that she first began to realize how dear he had grown; then that she decided she might, in time, be brought to consider marrying a Briton, even though she was a Yankee through and through. That is, of course, if he would be sensible, and discard all those absurd notions of joining the army and going to India and devoting all his life to His Majesty's service, and settle down, instead, on a comfortable little sheep—or cattle ranch.

Of course, he was really very dignified and military in appearance, in his trim

gray uniform and white belt and gloves, with a sword at his side; and there was no denying that he was a marvel with a rifle, and that a bugle-call made his eyes brighten as even her most winsome smiles failed to do. But for all that, it was just make-believe militarism, and he himself just a little tin soldier.

So May passed, and the Institute closed for the summer, and all the cadets went home; and Laurel read in the newspapers,—"Movements of Ocean Steamships: Sailed, the Orduna, New York to Liverpool," with just the suspicion of a tear in her eye, and in her heart the memory of a kiss; for on the passenger list of the Orduna appeared the name of Norval Kingsley.

He wrote to her every week throughout the summer; and then, one day early in August, came a letter saying that she must not expect to hear from him again, as he and his uncle were returning soon to America, in order that he might not be late in re-entering the Institute.

Just a few days later the war-cloud broke, and Laurel smiled a little as she read of it, dreadful though it was to her as to everyone else. Would the call of the bugle lure the boy lover into His Majesty's service? No, she told herself confidently. For this was real war—and he was only a little tin soldier.

Yet, when the Institute opened on the ninth of September, one dear, familiar face was absent from the ranks of the lads in gray. One little soldier had stripped

marching at the head of his foes, saw his comrades waiting, rifles ready; saw them waver when they recognized his uniform and his white, tense face. He realized that, to the last man, they would suffer themselves to be captured, rather than send a bullet where it would endanger his life.

And then he broke the strange, unnatural silence with a shout.

"Shoot!"

Still they wavered.

"Shoot!" he shouted again. "Never mind me! Remember our country! Are you cowards all?"

The answer was a deafening volley, a stinging shower of leaden hail. He was one of the first to fall, and he lay still among the prone forms of his foes.

After a time he was conscious of someone bending over him, examining his wounds.

"Laurel," he whispered. "Laurel—"

"Yes," said the surgeon tenderly. "Laurels—a never-fading crown!"

"You don't understand," he replied wearily. "Laurel—a girl over in America—tell her—"

But the blue eyes closed, and the surgeon withdrew his arm from beneath the golden head.

The little girl in Roswell does not understand, does not attempt to study, the underlying causes of the war. Indemnities, reprisals, concessions, expansion of territories, to her are meaningless terms. In her heart is no room for bitterness, or



Australians Landing at Gaba Tepe, Dardanelles
Australians, who fought so valiantly in the assault on the Dardanelles, landing their artillery north of Gaba Tepe, Dardanelles.

the veneer of tin and revealed the finely tempered steel—for
"Clearer called the snare-drum, 'We must march, march, march!'
And sweeter sang the bugle, 'Will you follow?'"

He was not only the idol of the regiment, but a thoroughly good soldier as well; so good a soldier that he stuck to his post at the machine-gun in his charge and sent leaden death into the ranks of the enemy, so that, in spite of the overwhelming numbers of the opposing forces, his own regiment was enabled to make a dignified retreat, with light losses.

But he and his assistant were captured. He did not mind that; he would escape or be exchanged, sooner or later; and in the meantime, he was well treated, and had the satisfaction of knowing that he had been of service to his country and his comrades.

Yet, even while he mused thus, his country's foes were planning to gain by his patriotism and popularity. And so, when they marched out to battle again, he was placed at the very head of the ranks, in one of the most dangerous positions.

"So young, so brave, so dearly loved!" his captors said among themselves. "His comrades would not see him come to harm, much less harm him themselves. And so we shall place him at the head of our ranks, where he will be of more value to us than steel armor or guardian angels."

And so indeed it would have proved, had not the little tin soldier been more courageous than even they imagined. He,

ought save sorrow for all the victims of the struggle—the men in the trenches and the women at home.

The strains of the bugle and the throb of the drum echo through the golden air, and the gray-clad cadets march in parade and review; but her heart throbs no longer in unison with their even footsteps, for there is missing from the ranks the fair face and the slender, boyish form of one whom she was wont to call her little tin soldier.

Willing To Learn

Mrs. Nelson had advertised in the "Want" columns of one of the newspapers for a girl who could cook and do general housework. There were several applicants for the position, but none of them impressed her favorably. At last came a fair-haired daughter of the Norseland, whose appearance, together with her answers to the questions that were propounded to her, were in the main satisfactory. There were one or two points, however, to be cleared up.

"Why did you leave your last place, Olga?"

"Dey vound vault wit' me."

"Found fault with you? What about?"

"Dey say I ban too eke-nomical."

"Well, was that true?"

"Yas, Ay tank Ay ban, but Ay can learn to be extravagant, ma'am."

"I'll take you, Olga," said Mrs. Nelson. "But," she hastened to add, "you can be as 'eke-nomical' as you please in this house."