Second Victory For Mars

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DAVID had called him at nine, just after he had finished giving old Jake Cranford his regular morning shave. The voice had sounded breathless. “Say, Dad, d’ya know what? I’ve decided for sure to volunteer. Jim is taking the stream-liner out of Randolph to Carlson City tomorrow and I’m going along. Think I’ll leave tonight on the 8:52. Isn’t it great?”

“Well, —uh, what’s the big rush? Did the General send you a telegram or something?”

“Oh, shucks, no, Dad. But, well, I’ve been thinking about it for quite a while, since I don’t have a job or anything. Then Jim phoned up long-distance and asked if I’d like to go on down to volunteer with him. Gee, I think it’s swell—Jim and I being cousins, I mean, and then I’ve always been interested in the air corps and in guns.”

For a moment nothing but a quiet hum came through the wire. “Hello, Dad, are you still there?”

“Sure. Yes. Of course I’m here. Have you spoken to your mother about it?”

“Yeah. She thinks it’s a good idea. And you?”

“Well, I don’t see why you should rush into it this way. Why don’t you find out a little about the army before joining?”

“Heck, ground-work with the air corps is just what I want. And the army needs good men now.”

Bill had tried to think of something to say. Then a customer, a stranger, had come in, and he had used this as an excuse to hang up. “We’ll talk about it tonight,” he’d said. The stranger had crawled up in the chair, and Bill had proceeded with the familiar routine of snipping, clipping, and brushing.

“We’re having nice sunny weather for November,” the stranger commented.

“Yes, it’s been pretty warm.”

THE sun hadn’t shone that other day. It had rained. So hard that he had walked in the dry strip near the store fronts, to keep his new uniform from becoming lumpier-looking than it
already was. There was a crowd at Jacobson's pool hall. Paul Hearst and Bob McDonald and a couple others he didn't remember were playing pool in the inverted V of yellow light cast by the overhead lamps in the center of the room, with everyone standing around smoking and talking loud. Somebody had noticed his uniform. "C'mon, fella, everything's on the house for you." That night there had been a big farewell supper at Aunt Minnie's with all the relatives there kidding him about how handsome he was in his "soldier clothes" and making him feel hot and pleasantly uncomfortable under the scratchy flannel.

Bill threw three dirty towels into the hamper by the sink. He never had thought David would really decide on the army. Of course the kid always had been ready for any crazy scheme anyone proposed. Once he had pawned his bicycle to get money to buy a popcorn stand. But this—. Maybe he could talk sense into the boy tonight.

By the time the two o'clock rush began, everyone in town had heard about Dave. Two customers were waiting, with old Judge McCurdy in the chair. "Well, Bill, it's something to have a son to go to the army," he remarked. Bill combed the few strands of hair over the Judge's bald spot.

ONE of the waiting customers looked up from the November issue of the Barber's Journal. "Yeah, if we could just get a good army together quick, I believe we could scare Hitler out. I heard over the radio this noon that the axis powers are making threats. Looks to me like we're in for a scramble. And, boy, the sooner the better, I sez. We've waited too long now."

"It's a lot of misery for a man to go through," Bill suggested reflectively.

"Oh, sure it's not fun. But then, Bill, you got a pretty good bonus. And that pension of yours isn't bad for just two pieces of shrapnel in your leg. Seems to me like the ex-service men got a pretty good deal."

John Dowell interrupted. "You know when I was in camp during the Spanish-American, I remember—." His voice was old and monotonous. Bill had learned to think without listening—just a nod or a grunt at intervals.

He remembers, does he!—I remember too. I remember crashing into the Pocahontas in mid-ocean. I remember being jolted
out of my bunk when we struck; the long hours of waiting for help to come out of that awful fog; and putting life-belts on the boys with flu; some of 'em begging to be taken up on the deck before the ship should sink, and one of 'em calling for his mother in a high, cracky, adolescent voice.

The men had all left the shop. Bill locked up and went home. When he opened the door he wrinkled up his nose distastefully. Sauerkrout. Might have known. Dave's favorite.

"It'll be ready in two shakes," Edith called to him from the kitchen. It had been two shakes for twenty-two years. Never any more. Never any less. Two shakes. He chuckled and switched on the radio. "—that this country will get into war. But the policy of the present government leans toward defending democracy against—" he snapped off the tense, clipped voice.

The front door slammed.

"Hi." It was Dave.

"Hello, son."

"Hi Mom. Sauerkrout. Hm." He took off his jacket, and, in a practiced manner, began to get the silver out of the drawer, meanwhile stealing a glance at the paper. "It says a coupla divinity students in Boise are up for failure to register. Saps." He twirled a tray on the end of his index finger, a trick he had learned when he was thirteen. "Some people don't know what side their bread is buttered on."

"Well, I don't know," said his mother, as they sat down. "I hate to see you go, of course. But someone has to. And it isn't as if you didn't know anything at all about it. Your guns and all." She straightened the chrysanthemums in the center bowl.

"Yeah, and all that Dad has told me."

BILL swallowed a mouthful with an effort. He wanted to tell it all over again. Only put in what he'd left out before. About the private who had attempted to cut a Sam Browne belt off a bloated German corpse. They'd laughed. He wished he'd told Dave about the memory he had of men laughing in the darkness, laughing at things that weren't funny—nerves shot by screaming shells and mud, and waiting—waiting—waiting—for nothing, or worse.

But his wife was saying, "And you'll make such good friends. You did, didn't you, Bill? Let's see, who was that one?"

"Gerrick," Bill answered shortly, frowning. Gerrick, slated to
make All-American the year he enlisted. Gerrick, singing his own dialect-version of "The Rose of Tralee" while they lay in sodden shell holes. Gerrick, shifting his bulk in the bunk and running his fingers through his stiff black hair, savagely—"Brother, whatever men owe the world for the privilege of living, we've paid it. When I get out of here, I'm going to go after what I can get, fast."

"He's the one you went to see, isn't he, dear?"

"Yeah." Yeah. Gerrick had been sitting in the solarium. His hair was gray and clipped close to his head. He was wearing a gray bath robe, like—a duster on a piece of worn-out furniture. His eyes were dead-looking, staring. He leaned forward and grinned. "Do you hear 'em?" he'd asked. "You hear 'em, don't you? They're not so loud today." That's the way it was. But a man couldn't very well tell that to Dave. It was easier just to tell him about Gerrick's receiving the Order of the Purple Heart.

Then Dave was speaking. "Well, I can't sit here all night eating. Guess I'd better get my stuff from upstairs."

"Bill, why don't you help Davey with his things? I've got to change and spruce up a bit. And Dave, be sure to put on a clean shirt."

Bill rose obediently. Maybe upstairs he could get the boy to think straight about this thing. But Dave's conversation ran on without a break. Obviously he was excited. He'd always been this way, remembered Bill, even before short fishing trips or visits to his Grandmother.

On the way to the railway station he besieged his parents with reminders and suggestions. Bill maneuvered the car through the heavy traffic. He felt a sudden impulse to stop and explain the whole thing. Dave, you see, this isn't playing soldier. It's the real McCoy. Your bayonet drill master will have studied anatomy. Your tag will be filed in the U. S. army office. It isn't cowboy and Indian stuff, it's——"

"You can park here, can't you, Bill? Looks like there's going to be quite a crowd."

Dave was caught up by the scene. "Gee, who would have supposed they'd turn out like this just for me," he commented in genuine pleasure.

March, 1941
"Glenston is just as proud of you as we are," his mother smiled at him.

Bill reached in his pocket for a cigarette. The band played when we left too. Played The Stars and Stripes Forever, and they all cheered themselves hoarse. And Dave, this is just the beginning of the story. In the last chapter the train brings home a flag-covered box, and the people who come down to the station don't cheer.

Then the train came puffing into the station—a black, angry, foreboding creature that stamped and snorted to be off again. Three minutes, it had said on the time-table. In three minutes it would be too late. He searched his brain frantically. He's your son. He's the little fella you bought erector sets for. You took him to the circus on a hot summer day, and the sawdust made him sneeze, and he wanted to pat an elephant on the trunk.

BILL clenched his teeth, and pushed in between the people, elbowing and shoving a path through the crowd. Finally he found himself beside his son, who stood, boyishly handsome in his tweed topcoat, smiling his last few goodbyes. The band started playing in a deafening crash. A trainman tapped Dave on the shoulder. "Well—" he bent and kissed his mother, shook his dad's hand. He was laughing and saying something they couldn't hear above the din.

Everything was quiet again. Bill stood a moment, then turned and walked slowly back toward the car. A light snow had begun to fall. Far off he could hear the whistle of the train as it sped farther into the darkness.

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**Gulliver**

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Sci. So.

EVERYONE is seeking something. The majority want security, some are searching for what they call happiness, a few seek themselves; fewer yet ever approach success in finding themselves. That is why Thomas Wolfe is a giant. He is a great Gulliver striding alone through a Lilliputian world. He is the rejected lover of life, pouring forth his candid praises in voluble magnificence. And that isn't all he is.