His Father’s Army

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Abstract

The Soldier did not want to play games. He had not said so in so many words. He had not said anything. After a while Frederico gave up talking to him and basked in the sunshine that streamed from the tall office windows. He imagined himself a commanding general surrounded by local troops...
THE SOLDIER did not want to play games. He had not said so in so many words. He had not said anything. After a while Frederico gave up talking to him and basked in the sunshine that streamed from the tall office windows. He imagined himself a commanding general surrounded by local troops.

Couriers were hurrying through the huge oak-paneled doorway, leaving the thick imported carpet streaked with mud. They did not salute the man seated at his father's desk, even though he was clearly in command. They merely delivered their messages and scurried away without smiling.

Frederico frowned. There had been neat, blue-uniformed soldiers in the palace and courtyard for as long as he could remember, and they had always been polite and friendly. He usually played hide-and-seek with the one assigned to take care of him.

He sat cross-legged on the soft carpet, next to the chair of the quiet soldier, and gravely saluted the courier standing
before the massive hand-carved desk. The man looked startled, stare down at Frederico with his mouth open, then snatched up his message and departed hastily.

Frederico resolved to tell his father about it. His father commanded all the soldiers.

Soldiers were marching in the courtyard, not the practiced rhythmic step he was accustomed to, but with a shuffling of many feet. He would have liked to watch, but his mother had forbidden him to look out the windows. Last night when the soldiers were practicing their rifles she had caught him peering over the sill and had jerked him away with a harsh scolding.

There were little round holes in the window today, and he hoped she would not blame him for that.

The sounds of marching ceased. The man sitting at his father's desk shoved the chair back, stretched, and reached for his battered military cap. His dull green uniform was wrinkled and mud spotted, but he did not seem to care.

Frederico knew his father would be angry if the soldier had gotten mud on his chair. His father had been angry when the soldiers came early this morning and he had still been shouting at them when they escorted him down the corridor. Frederico had not seen his mother this morning, but he had heard her yelling somewhere downstairs, probably at their muddy boots.

The soldier in charge was gazing out into the courtyard now. Frederico grinned. His father must be coming back. They would have to behave like real soldiers again.

The soldier waved his right hand above his head. The soldiers in the courtyard practiced their rifles again, but only one volley.

The man smiled and turned away from the window, noticing Frederico for the first time. "Get that kid out of here," he growled.

Frederico burned with indignation and stalked out of the office, followed by the quiet soldier. Imagine, soldiers ordering him about.

And worst of all they were taking his father's picture off the wall.