Nothing

Eileen Dudgeon*
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Abstract

JANET finished the last two blocks on the run. She was shivering although it was a bright, warm evening. As she neared the back door she slowed to a walk, finally stopping just outside the door. The hurried phone call still rang in her head. He would be here, she reminded herself...
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JANET finished the last two blocks on the run. She was shivering although it was a bright, warm evening. As she neared the back door she slowed to a walk, finally stopping just outside the door. The hurried phone call still rang in her head. He would be here, she reminded herself. After six long months his leave had come. But she had control of herself. Yes, she was sure of that. She made certain the little fist was still clenched around her heart and turned the knob.

The sweet heavy air of the kitchen smothered her for a minute and then cleared. There he stood. And she felt nothing. No sudden quirk in her stomach as always before; no sudden racing of her heart so that she could hear nothing but the pulsing of her blood. Not even the happiness she would feel for an old friend—nothing. And she had somehow counted on feeling something. Somehow thought that she would know when she saw him. But there was nothing—not even the old fear that he did not love her.

"Hello." She started forward, her hand out. But he pushed it aside, putting his hands on her shoulders. His eyes (yes, how well she remembered his eyes) were smiling down at her.

"Hi, Dick."

Suddenly she was relieved. The fist unclenched and her heart was all right. Something had decided the thing, and it was over. All this, and she felt nothing.

Able to breath without holding her diaphragm and allowing just so much air to pass at a time, Janet took his arm.

"You're certainly looking well." And she meant it. "Come on in: I've some new records you must hear."

So fifteen minutes passed—thirty—an hour, as they sat there smoking one cigarette after another—talking and listening. But the peace could not go on forever, Janet knew that. And he must have known it, too. Because after a little while he got up
and turned off the phonograph, replacing the arm on the little
hook that juts up. Then he came to the stool beside her chair
and said, "Let's talk."

Janet looked at him a little while, smiling as she saw the way
some strange barber had cut up the soft wave that was always
there. She smiled, too, at how young he looked beside the shining
gold bars that perched on his shoulders. And as she smiled, she
worked the diamond from her finger—slowly, deliberately dis­
lodging it from the groove it had worn. She held it in her fingers.
Her voice was gentle.

"You'd better keep this." Eternal—silence. Only a few sec­
onds, and yet she remembered so much. Their first meeting,
when he had just come to town and had come to that teen dance
with the huge girl in the blue satin dress. The summer he went
to camp and had returned when she was out with Ray. The time
they got stuck in the mud and the funny old farmer's team of
horses had pulled them out—that was the first time he had kissed
her.

Janet spoke, hardly realizing that she was continuing her
thoughts. "It was all so easy then, wasn't it? We went to school
and walked in the halls together between classes and met when
you were through basketball practice and I had finished on the
council. And we didn't have to worry about love or money or
educations or wars." Especially we didn't have to worry about
wars. "I guess we must have grown so used to each other that the
normal worries of people never occurred to us. Anyway, it won't
work." Janet brightened, holding the ring out to him. But his
hands were in his pockets.

"Why won't it work? All I'm asking is that you wait longer
than we had planned. Six years isn't so long."

"I know. Six years isn't so long. I could wait six years and
never miss them. But it's gone, now." Can't he understand that
it is gone now?

"I don't understand. What's gone? Love?"

"No, not love. Faith, I guess." Yes, faith in things that are
beautiful, like one person loving another person forever, or
peace and goodwill or— "You don't want to marry me—not any
more. I knew that when your letters came so reluctantly. Even
in six years we would be married just like everyone else—for con­
venience. No, it's gone." Just another case of poor, struggling,
frail faith strangled by brute reason. We must wait—no money—what about a job—it's sheer madness—living in one furnished apartment after another—war widow. But isn't madness the privilege of youth? When else can we be mad? And so faith is gone. “Maybe sometime again, Dick.”

Janet met his eyes and felt sorry. Sorry that it wasn't easy as it had been when they were young. Sorry for him because he was unhappy. She played with the ring in the palm of her hand, and held it out to him. When he did not take it, she reached over and dropped it into his pocket, stood up quickly. He rose, his hands still in his pockets; walked over to his coat.

“Goodbye, Dick. I could say I’m sorry, but I didn’t start all this.”

“I know you didn’t. I guess I’m sorry. I know that I want you very much.”

Janet smiled as she closed the door. All this and she felt nothing.

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**Military Recitation 101**

Irving Spratt

“TEN-SHUN!” Military Recitation Class 101 knocked chairs noisily together rising to their feet as the captain came through the doorway.

“Be seated, men.” The captain took off his steamed-over glasses, blew on them, and wiped them with his handkerchief while he bruskly announced, “Discussion for today is organization of the army.”

The class thumbed through their manuals for the chapter entitled “Organization” and left them open on the desks in case of questions. The captain started at the beginning of the alphabet as usual. Aasgardson was the receiver of the first question. Blonde, Swede, and flustered, he came to attention. “Well, sir, the purpose of organization in the army is to a, to,” he glanced at the manual on his desk, but the pages had flipped over to another section. “The purpose is in order to have an organized