Peanuts

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Abstract

Snap, pop, snap, pop. The noise was invading Joe’s mind...
SNAP, pop, snap, pop. The noise was invading Joe's mind. Snap, pop, snap, pop. Didn't Cramer have anything to do but sit and eat peanuts all day? The constant snap of the peanut shells was enough to drive a man crazy. Joe breathed a sigh of relief as he heard the crumple of the empty sack. Now maybe he could get some sleep.

He rolled over, his eyes still tightly shut. Concentrate now, breathe evenly and deeply, evenly and deeply. The deep noise-erasing sleep will come soon now.

Joe's life was filled with noises. Not big loud noises, but the little, everyday noises you heard around an Army barracks. The snapping of peanut shells, the soft mumble from the ever present poker game, an occasional clink of a beer can thrown into the five gallon butt can. But most of all the peanut shells.

Cramer was a nice guy. At least Joe had thought so until recently. But these last ten days that they had been lying around the barracks waiting for their shipping orders had become an endless bag of peanuts. Why couldn't the guy be nuts over bananas or something else nice and quiet. No, it was peanuts! Noisy, snapping goobers!

Well, it was quiet now. Maybe sleep would come before the next bag of peanuts. Breathe deeply and slowly, deeply and slowly.

Snap! Pop! Damn! Another bag so soon. Joe rolled over and cautiously opened one eye a narrow slit. There he sat on the end of his bunk with a pulp novel. Reading about the escapades of the half-dressed, voluptuous female on the cover. Reading avidly and consuming bushels of peanuts. Snap, pop. Another shell was added to the growing pile.

Snap, pop, snap, pop. Joe's hand gripped the steel rail it the side of the bunk. He could feel the blood rushing away
from the palm of his hand. The skin grew taut. Still the noise came through. Snap, pop, snap, pop.

Abruptly all noise ceased. All eyes turned to the top of the stairway. They could hear Scott whistling as he came upstairs. He stopped whistling as he reached the top of the steps and met the expectant gazes. He shook his head slowly. "Sorry fellas, no orders yet. The sarge says they're expecting them this afternoon but the one o'clock courier didn't have them."

Joe slumped back on his bunk. He never could stand to wait. Even when he was just a boy the grownups were always telling him to sit still. He was the one who could never sit on the bench and watch the others racing back and forth on the basketball court back at Wilson High. He had to be doing something. All through basic training they had been busy and Joe was happy. But now. All he could do was wait, and listen to the noises, the little, infuriating noises. Snap, pop. Cramer was busy at his peanuts again. Snap, pop. Joe's nerves were twanging like the strings of a guitar. The peanut shells were more effective than any brass pick. He rolled over onto his stomach and jerked his pillow down over his ears. Snap, pop, snap, pop. He pressed the pillow violently against his ears. Snap, pop, snap, pop. Even though muffled the sound came through, pounding, tearing at his ear drums. Snap, pop, snap, pop. The room was vibrating to the steady unison of the peanut shells. Joe jerked himself up and looked wildly around, searching for some refuge from this maddening sound. He saw Scott lying on his bunk, relaxing with a cigarette and comic book. For God's sake. Couldn't they hear it? Were they oblivious to the omnipresent sound?

Joe lashed out. "Scott, why the hell are you sitting there? Why aren't you down there at the Orderly Room waiting for those orders?"

"Jeese Joe, I just got back five minutes ago. I can't sit down there all day. If it'll make you feel any better, I'll go back again though." He got up and hurried out.

Suddenly Joe realized that everyone was staring it him. He was embarrassed and more than a little ashamed of his outburst. But they knew he got nervous when he was waiting. Like the time they were kept waiting in line for three
hours to get their shots. He had hit a guy that time. Didn't even know his name. The fellows had been sympathetic and had seemed to understand. They hadn't even kidded him about the visit to the head shrinker. Why were they all looking at him so reproachfully now? He would apologize to Scott when he got back.

He lay back and closed his eye again. After a few minutes the soft murmer began again. He relaxed, letting himself slide into a half-awake stage that always calmed him down after an episode like this one. The minutes slipped by and soon he was completely calm again.

Then it started. Snap, pop, snap, pop. Joe steeled himself. He wouldn't let it get the better of him again. Snap, pop. He sat up and picked up a magazine. Snap, pop, snap, pop. The words on the page blurred. Snap, pop. He stuck a cigarette in his mouth and shakily lit a match. Snap, pop, snap, pop. The flame flickered with each note. Snap, pop, snap, pop. Joe threw the freshly lit cigarette down and leaped to his feet. His fists clenched, he shouted in Cramer's face. "Lay off those damned peanuts or so help me I'll slug you!"

Cramer grinned up at him idiotically. "Does it bother you, Joe?" As he said it he popped another peanut shell.

Joe stepped forward and his right shoulder dropped as he started a round house swing. The arm stopped violently as someone grabbed him from behind. As Joe swung to meet his new adversary, they heard running steps on the stairs. Scott rushed into the room, his face flushed. He was shouting at the top of his lungs. "They're here! They're here! We leave at eight in the morning. Hurrah!"

Peanuts, poker, everything was forgotten in the mad uproar. Joe looked over at Cramer. Cramer smiled at him and offered his hand. Joe grinned and said, "Come on, Buddy. Let's go get a beer and celebrate."