

“On Oskaloosa Time” by Jerry J. Fanning

Squinting to focus on the faded postcard photo, Chance hadn't taken a second glance at it when his mother handed it to him on her visit to the VA hospital. So long ago. He was only 10, well almost 11. What did a few days matter when you had the whole summer for baseball! It had been his life. That was practically all he thought about, that and Jennie, the next-door girl who shyly watched them. Catching her glance some-times, he'd turn red all over and then endure the merciless teasing. His friends called him a “Mama's Boy” and maybe he had been. But he had loved his mother, listening to her soft word with up-turned face waiting for her goodbye kiss so he could go!

Yes, years of summers and baseball. And then his mother, a long time widow, did the unthinkable and left him with his uncle to go to high school. She moved to a nearby town, leaving him feeling betrayed. It was hard to love her then.

Those memories almost overwhelmed him as he sat there warm in the sun, a damned invalid in his eyes. His stump disgusted him. How do you take care of an itch in your brain that isn't visible? Sometimes stuff like that nearly drove him crazy. Like the guilt of letting his buddy die while he secured the tourniquet on his own leg before he passed out. He made it out in the chopper along with his dead buddy.

War is hell. No two ways about it.

They brought him back Stateside but he didn't want to see anybody, least of all his mother. In his head he wasn't a whole person anymore. How do you deal with that? But Chance's psychotherapist was helping him deal with that because he could live with himself now. He'd give his mother another chance, he guessed.

“Mr. Wilson, Chance!” Brought back from his mother's soft words of that long ago time, he looked up at the therapist.

“We're ready to check out that new leg but first you have a visitor.”

Half expecting to see his mother he was shocked as Jennie emerged. Immediately his mood brightened. It was like a ray of sunshine had hit him.

Shyly she said, “Hi, Chance.” Same old Jennie; that made him feel warm inside.

“Hi, Jennie, I saw you at my party before I went overseas and you were alone. I wanted to talk but there was too many people around.”

“Yeah, me too. Could we talk when you're done?”

“Okay, I'll be ready soon. How long will this take, doc?” Watching their expressions and chuckling, the orderly responded, “About an hour but your friend could come too if she wants.”

Without hesitation it was, “Yes, I'd like that, Chance, if it's okay with you.”

Trying not to show his new-found enthusiasm, Chance fairly well yelled, “Super!” And then he turned beet red. Same old Chance.

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