"Yeah," Burke says. "Get dressed. Put your coat on over your medals."

Soft-Boiled Sergeant

By J. D. SALINGER

A story that offers this unassailable recipe for permanent wedded bliss: Don't never marry no dame until you find one who will cry over a guy like Burke.

JUANITA, she's always dragging me to a million movies, and we see these here shows all about war and stuff. You see a lot of real handsome guys always getting shot pretty neat, right where it don't spoil their looks none, and they always got plenty of time, before they croak, to give their love to some doll back home, with who, in the beginning of the pitcher, they had a real serious misunderstanding about what dress she should ought to wear to the college dance. Or the guy that's croaking nice and slow has got plenty of time to hand over the papers he captured off the enemy general or to explain what the whole pitcher's about in the first place. And meantime, all the other real handsome guys, his buddies, got plenty of time to watch the handsomest guy croak. Then you don't see no more, except you hear some guy with a bugle handy take time off to blow taps. Then you see the dead guy's home town, and around a million people, including the mayor and the dead guy's folks and his doll, and maybe the President, all around the guy's box, making speeches and wearing medals and looking spiffier in mourning duds than most folks do all dolled up for a party.

Juanita, she eats that stuff up. I tell her it sure is a nice way to croak; then she gets real sore and says she's never going to no show with me again; then next week we see the same show all over again, only the war's in Dutch Harbor this time instead of Guadalcanal.

Juanita, she went home to San Antonio yesterday to show our kid's hives to her old lady—better than having the old lady jump in on us with eighty-five suitcases. But I told her about Burke just before she left. I wisht I hadn't of. Juanita, she ain't no ordinary dame. If she sees a dead rat laying in the road, she starts smacking you with her fists, like as if it was you that run over it. So I'm sorry I told her about Burke, sort of. I just figured it'd stop her from making me go to all them war movies all the time. But I'm sorry I told her. Juanita, she ain't no ordinary dame. Don't never marry no ordinary dame. You can buy the ordinary dame a few beers, maybe trip the light fantastict with them, like that, but don't never marry them. Wait for the kind that starts smacking you with their fists when they see a dead rat laying in the road.

If I'm gonna tell *you* about Burke, I gotta go back a long ways, explain a couple of things, like. You ain't been married to me for twelve years and you don't know about Burke from the beginning.

I'm in the Army, see.

That ain't right. I'll start over, like.

You hear guys that come in on the draft kick about the Army, say how they wish they was out of it and back home, eating good

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SOFT-BOILED SERGEANT

(Continued from Page 18)

chow again, sleeping in good bunks again—stuff like that. They don't mean no harm, but it ain't nice to hear. The chow ain't bad and there ain't nothing wrong with the bunks. When I first come in the Army, I hadn't eat in three days, and where I been sleeping—well, that don't matter.

I met more good guys in the Army than I ever knowed when I was a civilian. And I seen big things in the Army. I been married twelve years now, and I wisht I had a buck for every time I told my wife, Juanita, about something big I seen that's made her say, "That gives me goose pimples, Philly." Juanita, she gets goose pimples when you tell her about something big you seen. Don't marry no dame that don't get goose pimples when you tell her about something big you seen.

I come in the Army about four years after the last war ended. They got me down in my service record as being eighteen, but I was only sixteen.

I met Burke the first day I was in. He was a young guy then, maybe twenty-five, twenty-six, but he wasn't the kind of a guy that would of ever looked like a young guy. He was a real ugly guy, and real ugly guys don't never look very young or very old. Burke, he had bushy black hair that stood up like steel wool, like, on his head. He had them funny, slopy-like, peewee shoulders, and his head was way too big for them. And he had real Barney Google goo-goo-googly eyes. But it was his voice that was craziest, like. There ain't no other voice like Burke's was. Get this: It was two-toned. Like a fancy whistle. I guess that's part why he never talked much.

But Burke, he could do things. You take a real ugly guy, with a two-toned voice, with a head that's too big for their shoulders, with them goo-goo-googly eyes—well, that's the kind of a guy that can do things. I've knowed lots of Handsome Harrys that wasn't so bad when the chips was down, but there never was one of them that could do the big things I'm talking about. If a Handsome Harry's hair ain't combed just right, or if he ain't heard from his girl lately, or if somebody ain't watching him at least part of the time, Harry ain't gonna put on such a good show. But a real ugly guy's just got himself from the beginning to the end, and when a guy's just got himself, and nobody's ever watching, some really big things can happen. In my whole life I only knowed one other guy beside Burke that could do the big things I'm talking about, and he was a ugly guy too. He was a little lop-eared tramp with TB on a freight car. He stopped two big gorillas from beating me up when I was thirteen years old—just by insulting them, like. He was like Burke, only not as good. It was part because he had TB and was almost dead that made him good. Burke, he was good when he was healthy like.

First off, maybe you wouldn't think what Burke done for me was the real big stuff. But maybe, too, you was never sixteen years old, like I was, sitting on a G.I. bunk in your long underwear, not knowing nobody, scared of all the big guys that walked up the barracks floor on their way to shave, looking like they was tough, without trying—the way real tough guys look. That was a tough outfit, and you could take my word for it. Them boys was nearly all quiet tough. I'd like to have a nickel for every shrapnel or mustard-scar that I seen on them boys. It was Capt. Dickie Pennington's old company during the war, and they was all regulars, and they wasn't busted up after the war, and they'd been in every dirty business in France.

So I sat there on my bunk, sixteen years old, in my long underwear, crying my eyes out because I didn't understand nothing, and those big, tough guys kept walking up and down the barracks floor, swearing and talking to theirselves easy like. And so I sat there crying, in my long underwear, from five in the afternoon till seven that night. It wasn't that the guys didn't try to snap me out of it. They did. But, like I said, it's only a couple of guys in the world that really know how to do things.

Burke, he was a staff sergeant then, and in them days staffs only talked to other staffs. I mean staffs except Burke. Because Burke come over to where I was sitting on my bunk, bawling my head off—but quiet like—and he stood over me for around twenty minutes, just watching me like, not saying nothing. Then he went away and come back again. I looked up at him a couple times, and figured I seen about the ugliest-looking guy I ever seen in my life. Even in uniform Burke was no beaut, but that first time I seen him he had on a fancy store bathrobe, and in the old Army only Burke could get away with that.

For a long time, Burke just stood there over me. Then, sudden like, he took something out of the pocket of his fancy store bathrobe and chucked it on my bunk. It chinked like it had dough in it, whatever it was. It was wrapped up in a handkerchief and it was about the size of a kid's fist.

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"Major Brunstock's here with his Walkie-Talkie."

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FEDERAL-MOGUL

SLEEVE FEDERAL Mogul BEARINGS

(*Continued from Page 82*)

I looked at it, and then up at Burke.

"Untie them ends and open it up," Burke says.

So I opened up the handkerchief. Inside it was a hunk of medals, all pinned together by the ribbons. There was a bunch of them, and they was the best ones. I mean the best ones.

"Put 'em on," Burke says, in that cockeyed voice of his.

"What for?" I says.

"Just put 'em on," Burke says. "You know what any of them are?"

One of them was loose and I had it in my hand. I knowed what it was, all right. It was one of the best ones, all right.

"Sure," I says. "I know this one. I knowed a guy that had this one. A cop in Seattle. He give me a handout."

Then I give Burke's whole bunch of medals the once-over. I seen most of them on guys somewheres.

"They all yours?" I says.

"Yeah," says Burke. "What's your name, Mac?"

"Philly," I says, "Philly Burns."

"My name's Burke," he says. "Put them medals on, Philly."

"On my underwear?" I says.

"Sure," says Burke.

So I done it. I untangled Burke's bunch of medals and pinned every one of them on my G.I. underwear. It was just like I got a order to do it. The googly-eyed guy with the cockeyed voice told me to. So I pinned them on—straight acrost my chest, and some of them right underneath. I didn't even know enough to put them on the left side. Right smack in the middle of my chest I put them. Then I looked down at them, and I remember a big, fat, kid's tear run out of my eye and splashed right on Burke's Crah de Gairry. I looked up at Burke, scared that maybe he'd get sore about it, but he just watched me. Burke, he really knowed how to do big things.

Then, when all Burke's medals was on my chest, I sat up a little off my bunk, and come down hard so that I bounced, and all Burke's medals chimed, like—like church bells, like. I never felt so good. Then I sort of looked up at Burke.

"You ever seen Charlie Chaplin?" Burke says.

"I heard of him," I says. "He's in movie pitchers."

"Yeah," Burke says. Then he says, "Get dressed. Put your coat on over your medals."

"Just right over them, like?" I says.

And Burke says, "Sure. Just right over them."

I got up from my bunk with all them medals chiming, and looked around for my pants. But I says to Burke, "I ain't got one of them passes to get out the gate. The fella in that little house said it wouldn't be wrote out for a couple days yet."

Burke says, "Get dressed, Mac."

So I got dressed and Burke got dressed. Then he went in the orderly room and come out in about two minutes with my name wrote out on a pass. Then we walked into town, me with Burke's medals chiming and clanking around under my blouse, me feeling like a hot-shot, happy like. Know what I mean?

I wanted Burke to feel sort of happy like too. He didn't talk much. You couldn't never tell what he was thinking about. I called him "Mister" Burke most of the time. I didn't even know you was supposed to call him sergeant. But, thinking it over, most of the time I didn't call him nothing; the way it is when you think a guy's really hot—you don't call him nothing, like as if you don't feel you should ought to get too clubby with him.

Burke, he took me to a restaurant. I eat everything like a horse, and Burke paid for the whole thing. He didn't eat nothing much.

I says to him, "You ain't eating nothing."

"I ain't hungry," Burke says. Then he says, "I keep thinking about this girl."

"What girl?" I says.

"This here girl I know," Burke says. "Got red hair. Don't wiggle much when she walks. Just kind of walks straight like."

He didn't make no sense to a sixteen-year-old kid.

"She just got married," Burke says. Then he says, "I knowed her first though."

That didn't interest me none, so I goes on feeding my face.

After we eat—or after *I* eat—we went to the show. It was Charlie Chaplin, like Burke said.

We went inside and the lights wasn't out yet, and when we was walking down the aisle Burke said "Hello" to somebody. It was a girl with red hair, and she said "Hello" back to Burke, and she was sitting with a fella in civvies. Then me and Burke sat down somewheres. I asked him if that was the redhead he was talking about when we was eating. Burke nodded like, and then the pitcher started.

I jiggled around in my seat the whole show, so's people would hear them medals clanking. Burke, he didn't stay for the whole show. About halfways through the Chaplin pitcher he says to me, "Stay and see it, Mac. I'll be outside."

When I come outside after the show I says to Burke, "What's the matter, Mr. Burke? Don't you like Charlie Chaplin none?" My sides was hurting from laughing at Charlie.

HALF-HITCH

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

Burke says, "He's all right. Only I don't like no funny-looking little guys always getting chased by big guys. Never getting no girl, like. For keeps, like."

Then me and Burke walked back to camp. You never knowed what kind of sad-like thoughts Burke was thinking while he walked, but all I was thinking was, *Will he want these here medals back right away?* I always have kind of wished that I would of knowed enough that night to say something nice like to Burke. I wisht I'd of told him that he was way better than that there redhead that he knowed first. Maybe not that, but I could of said something. Funny, ain't it? A guy like Burke could live a whole life being a great man, a really great man, and only about twenty or thirty guys, at most, probably knowed about it, and I bet there wasn't one of us that ever kinda tipped him off about it. And never no women. Maybe a coupla ordinary dames, but never the kind that don't wiggle when they walk, the kind that sort of walks straight like. Them kind of girls, the kind Burke really liked, was stopped by his face and that rotten joke of a voice of his. Ain't that nice?

When we got back to the barracks, Burke says, "You want to keep them medals a while, don't you, Mac?"

"Yeah," I says. "Could I?"

"Sure," says Burke. "You can keep 'em if you want 'em."

"Don't you want 'em?" I says.

Burke says, "They don't look so good on me. Good night, Mac." Then he goes inside.

I sure was a kid. I wore them medals of Burke's on my G.I. underwear for three weeks straight. I even wore them when I washed up in the mornings. And none of them tough birds razzed me none. They was Burke's medals I had on. They didn't know what made Burke tick, but about sixty per cent of the guys in that outfit had been in France with Burke. If Burke had give me them medals to wear on my G.I.'s, it was all right with them. So nobody laughed or give me the razz.

I only took them medals off to give them back to Burke. It was the day he was made first sergeant. He was sitting alone in the orderly room—the guy was always alone—at about half past eight at night. I went over to him and laid his medals down on the desk; they was all pinned together and wrapped in a handkerchief, like when he chucked them on my bunk.

But Burke, he didn't look up. He had a set of kid's crayons on his desk, and he was drawing a pitcher of a girl with red hair. Burke, he could draw real good.

"I don't need them no more," I says to him. "Thanks."

"Okay, Mac," Burke says, and he picks up his crayon again. He was drawing the girl's hair. He just let his medals lay there.

I started to take off, but Burke calls me back, "Hey, Mac." He don't stop drawing though.

I comes back over to his desk.

"Tell me," Burke says. "Tell me if I'm wrong, like. When you was settin' on your bunk cryin' ——"

"I wasn't crying," I says. (What a kid.)

"Okay. When you was settin' on your bunk laughin' your head off, was you thinking that you wanted to be laying on your back in a boxcar on a train that was stopped in a town, with the doors rolled open halfways and the sun in your face?"

"Kind of," I says. "How'd you know?"

"Mac, I ain't in this Army straight out of West Point," Burke says.

I didn't know what West Point was, so I just watched him draw the pitcher of the girl.

"That sure looks like her," I says.

"Yeah, don't it?" says Burke. Then he says, "Good night, Mac."

I starts to leave again. Burke calls after me, like, "You're transferrin' out of here tomorrow, Mac. I'm getting you sent to the Air Corps. It's gonna be big stuff."

"Thanks," I says.

Burke, he give me some last advice just as I goes out the door. "Grow up and don't cut nobody's throat," he says.

I shipped out of that outfit at ten o'clock the next morning, and I never saw Burke again in my whole life. All these years I just never met up with him. I didn't know how to write in them days. I mean I didn't write much in them days. And even if I would of knowed how, Burke wasn't the kind of a guy you'd write to. He was too big, like. Too big for me, anyways.

I never even knowed Burke transferred to the Air Corps himself, if I hadn't of got this letter from Frankie Miklos. Frankie, he was at Pearl Harbor. He wrote me this letter. He wanted to tell me about this fella with this crazy voice—a master, Frankie said, with nine hash marks. Named Burke.

Burke, he's dead now. His number come up there at Pearl Harbor. Only it didn't exactly come up like other guys' numbers do. Burke put his own up. Frankie seen Burke put his own number up, and this here is what Frankie wrote me:

The Jap heavy stuff was coming over low, right over the barracks area, and dropping their load. And the light stuff was strafing the whole area. The barracks was no place to be safe like, and Frankie said the guys without no big guns was running and zigzagging for any kind of a halfways decent shelter. Frankie said you couldn't get away from the Zeros. They seemed to be hunting special-like for guys that was zigzagging down the streets for shelter. And the bombs kept dropping, too, Frankie said, and you thought you was going nuts.

Frankie and Burke and one other guy made it to the shelter okay. Frankie said that him and Burke was in the shelter for about ten minutes, then three other guys run in.

One of the guys that come in the shelter started telling about what he just seen. He seen three buck privates that just reported to the mess hall for K.P. lock theirselves in the big mess-hall refrigerator, thinking they was safe there.

Frankie said when the guy told that, Burke sudden-like got up and started slapping the guy's face around thirty times, asking him if he was nuts or something, leaving them guys in that there refrigerator. Burke said that was no safe place at all, that if the bombs didn't make no direct hit, the vibration like would kill them buck privates anyhow, on account of the refrigerator being all shut up like.

Then Burke beat it out of the shelter to get them guys out of the refrigerator. Frankie said he tried to make Burke not go, but Burke started slapping *his* face real hard too.

Burke, he got them guys out of the refrigerator, but he got gunned by a Zero on the way, and when he finally got them refrigerator doors open and told them kids to get the hell out of there, he give up for good. Frankie said Burke had four holes between his shoulders, close together, like group shots, and Frankie said half of Burke's jaw was shot off.

He died all by himself, and he didn't have no messages to give to no girl or nobody, and there wasn't nobody throwing a big classy funeral for him here in the States, and no hot-shot bugler blowed taps for him.

The only funeral Burke got was when Juanita cried for him when I read her Frankie's letter and when I told her again what I knowed. Juanita, she ain't no ordinary dame. Don't never marry no ordinary dame, bud. Get one that'll cry for a Burke.

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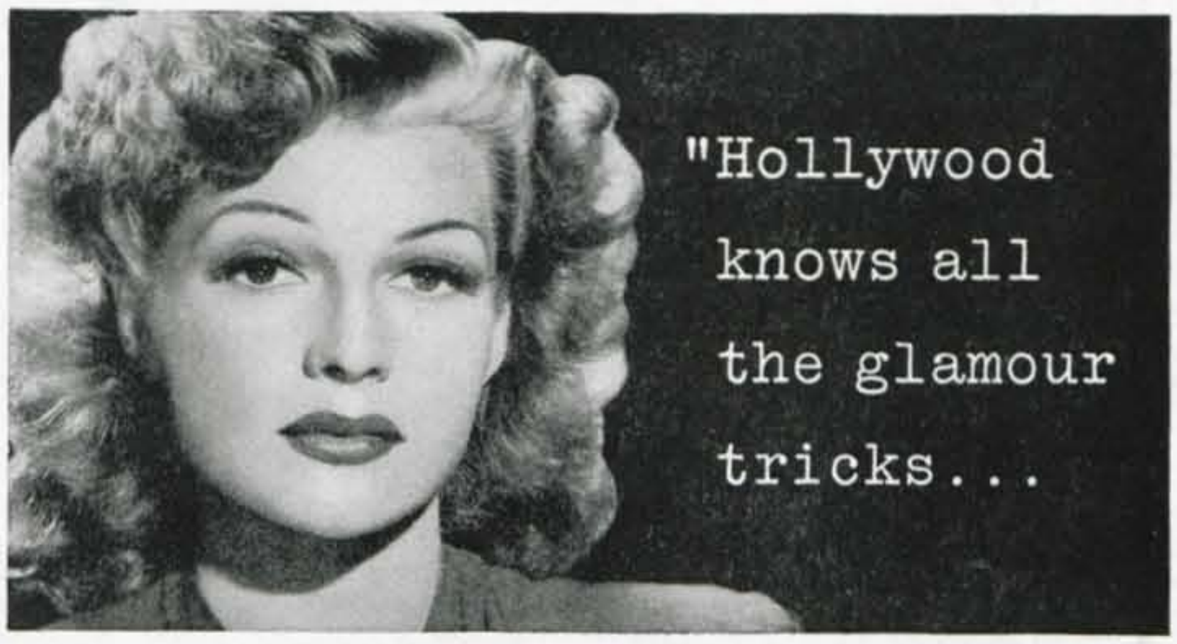

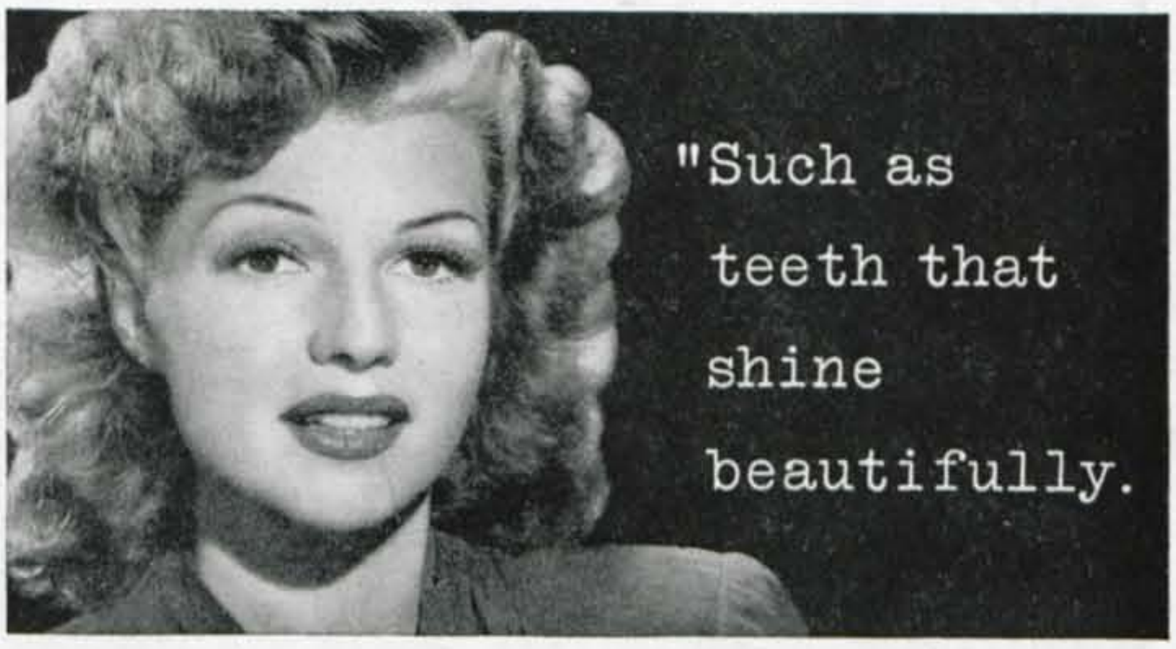

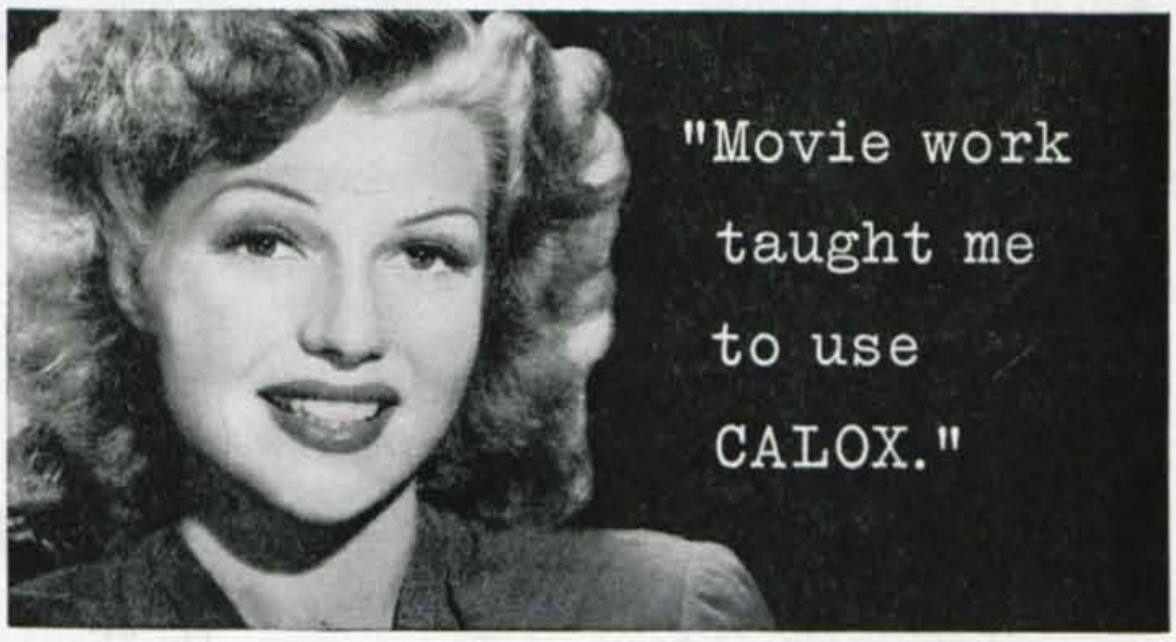

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