

SETTING: *The army camp of the New York 304th Infantry in Falmouth, Virginia 1863. The Union flag flies on a pole. Three bedrolls are on the ground. A small campstool sits to one side. Three rifles lean together to form a teepee. Three knapsacks lie next to them.*

AT RISE: *HENRY FLEMING is sleeping in the downstage bedroll. WILSON is asleep in another. The third one is empty. We hear the sounds of early morning. WILSON snores loudly, mutters to himself, then rolls over and continues sleeping, faced upstage. As HENRY begins to dream, we hear appropriate “night dream music” under then MA enters hurriedly. She crosses downstage of HENRY and looks around, not seeing him.*

MA

Henry!

(HENRY stirs restlessly in his sleep.)

Henry Fleming! Where are you?

(HENRY sees her and sits up.)

HENRY

Ma...? Is that you...?

(MA looks up as if seeing a tightrope in the circus.)

MA

What're you doing up there, boy?

(HENRY stands up behind her)

HENRY

I joined the circus, Ma. Look!

(He holds up his arms as if balancing on a tightrope.)

I'm gonna walk the tightrope!

MA

Come on down from there, Henry!

(HENRY tries to take a step forward and stops.)

HENRY

I can't move, Ma! I'm afraid!

MA

If you stay up there you're gonna fall.

HENRY

Help, Ma – help!

(MA starts to exit.)

MA

You're gonna fall, Henry.

HENRY

Ma, help!

MA

You're gonna fall...

(HENRY sinks to his knees and reaches for her.)

HENRY

Ma!

(MA exits. The dream music stops.)

WILSON

What's that?

(WILSON rolls back over, sits up and looks around.)

Who ya talkin' to, Henry?

HENRY

Nobody.

WILSON

You dreamin' about your ma again?

HENRY
Yep.

WILSON
You been dreamin' 'bout her a lot. What was it this time?

HENRY
The circus.

WILSON
Your ma was in the circus?

HENRY
No, *I* was in the circus.

WILSON
Where was your Ma?

HENRY
Ma was hollerin' at me.

WILSON
'Bout what?

HENRY
I... I don't remember. I woke up.

WILSON
What do you s'pose it means?

HENRY
It don't mean nothin' Wilson. It was just a dream.

WILSON
I bet your ma's ghost was tryin' to tell you that we're getting' ready to go into battle!

HENRY
My Ma don't have a ghost, idiot. She ain't dead.

WILSON
Oh. Right.

HENRY

Besides, I don't reckon we're ever goin' to see battle, the way these generals just march us all over hither and yon with nary a rifle fired for all our trouble. I didn't join this army to march, by jiminy. I joined it to fight!

(JIM CONKLIN *enters*. BILLY *enters behind him*.)

JIM

And fight you will, Henry – sooner'n you think!

WILSON

What's that you say, Jim?

JIM

We're goin' to move tomorrow, sure! We're goin' way up the river, cut across, and come around in behind 'em.

WILSON

How do you know?

BILLY

Where'd you hear this, Jim?

JIM

A friend of mine in the one-twenty-fourth told me. He heard it from a cavalryman who heard it from a friend who heard it from an orderly at division headquarters. It's pretty much straight from the horse's mouth. The three hundred and fourth is marchin' out tomorrow!

BILLY

I don't believe it.

WILSON

It's a lie, that's all it is. A thunderin' lie!

JIM

Who you callin' a liar, Wilson?

WILSON

I ain't callin' nobody a liar. I just said it's a *lie*.

JIM

What do you know about it?!

WILSON

I know I've got ready to move eight times in the last two weeks and we ain't moved yet!

(LIEUTENANT *enters.*)

LIEUTENANT

What's going on here?

(*The men stop arguing and snap to attention.*)

BILLY

Jim's got some news, Lieutenant.

LIEUTENANT

What's up, Jim?

JIM

The word is we're movin' out tomorrow, sir.

LIEUTENANT

Where did you hear that?

JIM

Pretty much straight from the horse's mouth, sir.

WILSON

Too bad it's the other end of the horse talkin' now.

LIEUTENANT

We'll see about this!

(LIEUTENANT *exits.* JIM *starts off the other way.*)

BILLY

Where you goin', Jim?

JIM

Why, to spread the news, o' course.

(JIM *exits.* WILSON *hurries after him.*)

WILSON

Ain't nobody goin' to believe you!

(WILSON *exits.*)

BILLY

Do you believe it, Henry?

(HENRY *shrugs.* BILLY *crosses to the flag and grabs an end of it.*)

BILLY

Just think, Old Glory – tomorrow I'll be carryin' you into battle! Yee-ha!

(*Whooping and hollering, BILLY runs off after JIM. HENRY is alone.*)

HENRY

Ma, I don't know what to do.

(*Daydream music begins. MA enters.*)

MA

'Bout what, son?

HENRY

We're movin' out soon. We're goin' into battle *tomorrow*.

MA

Too late to worry 'bout that now. You shoulda worried 'bout all that before you enlisted.

(HENRY *turns away.*)

Didn't I try to discourage you from doin' this fool thing? Didn't I give you a hundred good reasons why you shoulda stayed home on the farm, helpin' out your ma? But you didn't listen. Why, I remember the day you came back from town, all puffed up and proud as a peacock...

(*She grabs the campstool, carries it downstage and sits on it.*)

I was in the barn, milkin' the brindle cow...

(*She starts milking an imaginary cow.*)

And you come in and said...

HENRY

Ma, I've enlisted.

(MA stops milking and looks up. Beat.)

MA

The Lord's will be done, Henry.

(MA goes back to milking.)

HENRY

Is that all you're goin' to say?

MA

What else is there?

HENRY

I read once where a Greek mama told her son "Return with your shield or on it."

MA

I ain't a Greek.

(MA stops milking. She stands up and faces him.)

I will say this, Henry – you watch out and take care of yourself. Don't go thinkin' you can lick the whole rebel army by yourself, because ya can't. You're just one little fella amongst a whole lot of others and you've got to keep quiet and do what they tell ya. I know how you are, Henry.

HENRY

Ma...

MA

You joined this here fight thinkin' it'll be all glory and Greeks. You'll find out the truth soon enough, and when that day comes, when Death stares you in the face, don't you go shirkin' your duty. Just think of me there watchin' you and you'll come out all right.

(She picks up the campstool, hands it to him then turns to leave.)

HENRY

Ma! What if I shirk my duty? What if I get scared and run?

(JIM enters angrily.)

JIM

By thunder if you ain't callin' me a liar again!

(MA turns and exits. The dream music ends. WILSON enters.)

WILSON

I ain't neither! I just know what I know and until I got proof...

JIM

Look, Wilson, it don't matter whether you believe me or not. All you got to do is sit down and wait and pretty soon you'll find out I was right.

(WILSON walks away. During the following exchange, he crosses to his knapsack, digs through it, pulls out paper and a yellow envelope, grabs a pencil stub out of his pocket and begins to write.)

HENRY

Goin' to be a battle for sure, is there, Jim?

JIM

Of course there is. You just wait 'til tomorrow and you'll see one of the biggest battles ever was.

HENRY

Thunder!

JIM

You'll see fightin', my boy, out-and-out *fightin'*!

WILSON

Huh!

HENRY

Well, like as not this story'll turn out just like them others did.

JIM

Not much it won't. Didn't the cavalry all start out this morning? Huh?

(WILSON and HENRY exchange a look.)

That's right. They say there ain't hardly any cavalry left in camp. They're goin' to Richmond – or some place – while we fight all the Johnnies. Some dodge like that.

WILSON

Shucks.

(He goes back to writing.)

HENRY
Jim?

JIM
What?

HENRY
How do you think our regiment'll do?

JIM
Oh, we'll fight all right, I guess – once we get used to it. There's been heaps o' fun poked at us because we're new and all that but we'll fight all right.

HENRY
I'm sick of all them veterans callin' me "fresh fish," that's for sure.

JIM
They're only doin' that because our uniforms are new and shiny. Come tomorrow we'll be as dirty as the next man.

HENRY
Think any of the boys'll run?

JIM
Oh, there may be a few of 'em run but there's them kind in every regiment. Specially the first time they see the elephant.

HENRY
What elephant?

JIM
The war. The *fightin'*. A course, the whole kit-and-kaboodle might run if some big fightin' comes first-off. Then again, they might stay and fight like mad. You can't bet on nothin'. We ain't never been under fire yet but I think we'll fight better than some and worse than others.

(WILSON *folds up his letter and puts it in the envelope.*)

WILSON
Oh, what do you know?

JIM
By thunder, I know enough!

HENRY

Did you ever think you might run yourself, Jim?

JIM

Well, I've thought it might get too hot for Jim Conklin in some of them scrimmages and if a whole lot of boys started to run, why, I s'pose I'd run with 'em. And once I started to run, make no mistake – I'd run like the devil. But if everybody was standin' and fightin', why, I'd stand and fight. By jiminey, I would. I'll bet on it.

WILSON

Huh!

(JIM is about to retaliate when we hear a bugle call. The three men shoulder their knapsacks, grab their rifles, etc. LIEUTENANT enters.)

LIEUTENANT

This is it, boys! We're moving out! Form up, form up!

(The men line up in formation. BILLY enters, grabs the flag and lines up with them.)

Forward – march!

(The bugle call is replaced by the fife and drum. In choreographed movements, all begin to march. After a few moments it becomes obvious that the heat of the day is beginning to affect the men. They shift their packs, wipe their brows, glance up at the sky.)

JIM

How much farther we goin', Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT

If we keep on this pace we should make it by nightfall.

WILSON

Nightfall?!

LIEUTENANT

You got a problem with that, Wilson?

(WILSON says nothing. They continue to march as the scene shifts to nightfall. A few more moments then LIEUTENANT holds up his hand.)