SECOND SOUTH

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Sitting back Philip felt the vibration of the train through his feet, and if he leaned forward a little he saw tops of heads and the silver sign that said "MEN" in black letters. The little blond boy who had gotten on at Denver came lurching down the aisle to sit by him again, but his mother said, "Don't bother the soldier anymore right now, honey." He wouldn't tell Philip his name. The sagebrush flats and gullies were full of the early evening shadows. After the train stopped at Price it would climb to the summit, drop down Spanish Fork Canyon into the valley to Springville, then Provo, and he would be home. The conductor came down the aisle, his gold watch chain in two loops across his fat stomach. Philip turned to look out the window again. In three hours he would be home and tomorrow was Sunday. Hanging from the baggage rack, his clean summer uniform swung gently.

When he thought about being home he felt something almost like pain. After his return from Germany and his discharge at Camp Kilmer three days before, he had gone straight to New York City to get a train. And he had walked down the New York streets only as far as he could keep Grand Central Station in sight. He was afraid that he might get lost and miss his train, get hit by a taxi, or be arrested. For two years he had dreamed about coming home to Utah, a thousand times pictured the Wasatch Mountains, the valley, Provo, Second South, the trees, green lawns with the sprays going, the clean water in the ditches, their white house. He heard his father calling in his two younger brothers, Allen and Mark, listened to his mother fixing the before-bed piece of cake or dish of bottled fruit in the kitchen. And he saw the Sixth Ward chapel, heard the singing on Sunday morning, everybody calling each other brother and sister, the girls lovely and clean in their Sunday dresses. He longed to return to all those things that were

familiar, good, beautiful and clean, leave Germany. Holding his two hands in his, palms up, his father had said to him on his last furlough, "Keep safe, son, and come home clean."

A white-jacketed waiter came through announcing the second call for supper. Philip stood up. He had waited purposely; supper would take nearly an hour if he ate slowly. Stopping in the men's room, he washed his face and hands and combed his hair. Later he would put on his clean uniform. He had made corporal and the family wanted to see him in his uniform before he took it off for good. His mother wrote that he should wait until he got home to buy his new civilian clothes so that she could go with him uptown to Taylor Brothers. The family didn't know just when he would arrive, and he was going to surprise them.

With a flick of his long yellow pencil the steward pointed him to an empty chair across the table from a sailor with two rows of combat ribbons. Rick, the sailor, told him what great occupation duty Japan was, how he hated to leave the geishas, soft job, easy black-market money, saki, the baths and massages, everything. He wanted to know if Germany was really as terrific as they said. Did the Germans still have plenty of jewelry, cameras and binoculars left, and would they sell anything for food, or was the German black market already shot? Could you keep one of those beautiful German blonde frauleins for just one pack of cigarettes a day? Were the German broads really just like State-side women? Gripping the cold filmy water glass, Philip stared out the window into the growing darkness. He got Rick talking about his ribbons.

When they stopped at Price, the little boy and his mother walked up and down on the platform through the squares of light from the diner windows. He looked up at Philip and waved. His mother took him by the hand to get back on the train, but he kept waving. Leaning back in his chair to light a cigarette, Rick wanted to know if they were related. The train pulled out of Price and started climbing toward the summit.

After Philip got back to his car he washed his hands, brushed his teeth, combed his hair, and then went up in the vista-dome. A few stars were out. The dome rocked like a boat at sea, and people were quieter than down below. Rick had started it all again for him, everything that he had tried to forget, the pictures he wanted to hold from his mind. Germany. Lying back in his seat he stared out through the curved vista-dome glass.

He had landed in Bremerhaven aboard the U.S.S. Ballou, a liberty ship, on an evening in early January. It was snowing. Because the train they boarded the next morning was poorly heated, they wore their overcoats, gloves and hats. All through high school he had heard the radio reports, seen the war movies and newsreels, but now he could hardly believe that he was in Germany. He stared out the window all day at the destroyed bridges, exploded locomotives and broken boxcars along the tracks, the burned-out German half-tracks and tanks lying near the roads. Bordered by walls of black pines, the white fields were empty of cattle, the villages lifeless, the cities vast piles of snow-covered rubble. Except for the children who spread their

gloveless red hands against the windows and begged for food, few people were in the stations. When it grew dark no lights burned inside or outside of the train, and it was like riding in a long tunnel.

They arrived in Frankfurt the next evening and were trucked through the dark snow-covered streets to Able Area, a fenced compound of yellow former-German army barracks, where they still wore their coats because it was so cold. After he had unpacked his duffel bag into the high wooden German wall locker, Philip stood and looked out the third-story window. Scattered in two's and three's, black against the snow, many women walked outside the high barbed-wire fence under the guard lights. Their breath white, they stood in small bunches to talk to the GI's who stood at open windows.

Beyond the fence it was dark. Reynolds, a short, bald corporal who bunked in the same five-man room, put his hand on his shoulder. "Take your pick, kid," he said; "all you need is this." And he held up a package of Camel cigarettes and motioned toward the women. A GI walked up to one of the women, spoke to her, and they walked away together. "See." Reynolds turned his face from the window. "How old are you, kid?" He said that he had just turned eighteen. He had joined the army for the GI Bill so that he could go to college and become a teacher. "Oh good hell, just eighteen." Reynolds gripped his shoulder tighter and asked him where he was from.

That night when he was in bed under four blankets and his overcoat and still cold, he heard Reynolds say, "You're in the promised land, kid. Lots of frauleins. I'll help you." The women begged for chocolate, soap, cigarettes, anything that they could eat or could barter on the black market for food or fuel. The Germans were starving and freezing. The women invited the GI's to come out, beckoned, made a play at climbing the fence, and then fought for what was thrown. But Reynolds said that a big redhead always won if she was around. There were sixty or seventy women, and some of them were old.

Able Area housed a service battalion, and he was assigned as a clerk-typist in the Provost Marshall's Section, European Command, where the thirty other GI's worked that bunked at his end of the hall. All but two of them had German girl friends. Every night after work the men ate supper, filled their canvas bags with PX items and food they stole from the mess hall, and left, going down the hall laughing, describing what they had in the bag tonight. Reynolds told him that he was nuts not to have a fraulein, urged him, and said that he could arrange it, but Philip shook his head. When the section found out he was from Utah, they wanted to know how many wives his father had.

Each night he polished his brass, his shoes, pressed his pants for the next day, often swept and mopped the room. And he hunched near the radiator in his overcoat to study German for his USAFI course, read library books, and to look up Book of Mormon scriptures that his mother noted in her letters. He watched the women walking outside the fence, but he never

opened the window. No matter how cold the water was he always showered, then, feeling clean, prayed lying in bed. Later, staring up at the white ceiling, he listened to the GI's returning, some drunk, their loud voices muffled behind the latrine door. Reynolds said nearly every night, "Kid, you just don't know what you're missing. It ain't natural." He didn't go to the monthly section parties and he wouldn't buy his cigarette ration to sell on the black market. They thought that he was crazy, called him Virginia, shouted it in front of his door at night, laughed, opened the door just enough to poke their heads in and say softly, "V-i-r-g-i-n-i-a."

He played ping-pong at the Red Cross Club with a GI named Simmons or they went to the movie, but mostly he was alone. Often he stared out the window at the grey spring clouds, the rain, the horizon without mountains, and at the ruins. The ruins made him feel more than any other thing that he had left the world he knew. From the trolley he saw the blocks of rubble, with only halves and quarters of buildings standing. There were walls where pictures still hung and curtains fluttered at windows. Old people, some crying, cupping their white faces with their hands, stood before the crosses planted in the red mounds of brick. He copied the notes tacked to the doors of blasted houses, and later, using his German dictionary, read of whole families killed, buried still, children burned alive. Sometimes he saw people digging into the mounds, but he didn't walk far into the ruins. Gangs of boys lived in the cellars hidden under the rubble, and when they couldn't steal they hunted the cats for food.

The desire to return home was like a vague sickness. At night he lay and imagined himself back in Provo, saw pictures on the white ceiling, the green valley, the high Wasatch Mountains surrounding everything. He cut the lawn, roughhoused with Mark and Allen, ate supper, helped his mother with the dishes, talked to his father on the front porch, walked a girl up to Hedquist's Drug Store for a malt. He went to church at the Sixth Ward, shook hands, called everybody brother and sister, sang, "Come, Come, Ye Saints," "We Thank Thee, O God, For A Prophet," "Zion Stands With Hills Sur-rounded." Or he saw himself discharged, going home, walking down Second South under the trees, the joy so strong in him that he wanted to drop his duffel bag and run shouting down the street. Over and over he planned how it would be.

Lying in his bunk in the morning, awake in the silent barracks, he stared up at the white ceiling again before he got up. He was always first down to the latrine. If all the sinks contained cigarette butts, vomit or used prophylactic kits, the little green tubes squeezed flat, he showered again, brushed his teeth under the clean spray. Twice a day he shaved.

Saturdays he watched the baseball games (Reynolds managed their team), went swimming often, and in August took a Special Services tour to Luxembourg for three days. Mrs. Thatcher, who lived two houses down from them, wanted him to visit her son's grave in a military cemetery there, and his mother wrote that it would be a nice thing for him to do. Bob had played football in high school, owned an old yellow Model-A Ford, and was a life-

guard at the North Park swimming pool during the summer. After he took the pictures, Philip looked down at the wreath on the green grass by the cross and wondered if he should salute. The cemetery wasn't finished, but already there were acres and acres of white markers.

When he got back to Frankfurt he thought about the German soldiers who had lived in his room, and he searched all the walls and the furniture looking for a name. Because there was no servicemen's branch of the Church where he was, he went to Protestant services and in the choir sang the unfamiliar hymns. The chaplain found out for him where the nearest German military cemetery was located, and he went there one Sunday afternoon, walked from marker to marker reading the names aloud. And after that Sunday he began throwing soap and candy to the women at the fence. When the big redhead got the soap she pantomined taking a bath, gestured for him to come with her, but he shook his head and she laughed. He made battalion soldier of the week two weeks straight and his mother had it put in the Provo *Daily Herald.* She said that he was being a fine example for other boys. His bishop wrote to congratulate him and asked how soon he wanted to go on a mission when he returned home.

Something touched Philip's knee, and he turned from the vista-dome window. The little blond boy looked up at him. "Can I sit up there too, soldier?" he asked. Later his mother came to the stairs and called him back. Across the canyon, headlights moved along the highway.

That fall he drove the weapons carrier for the monthly section parties. There had been an accident and they needed a driver who didn't drink. They wouldn't leave him alone about it; they said that it would do him good. Some of the frauleins were pretty, but most had flat, plain faces, and after they danced a faint sour odor rose from their unwashed bodies. Even with the GI's leaning over to kiss them, they ate and drank, the room full of grey cigarette smoke. When the GIs said that they called him Virginia and explained what it meant, the frauleins screamed, and when he refused to dance they raised their glasses to him. After he drove the couples home, clinging together, they lurched down the alleys or fumbled for keys at the high wooden doors facing the streets. The frauleins turned to yell for him to come too because they had a roommate, and he understood the German words mixed in with the English. The patched and broken windows glimmered in the weapons carrier headlights, and the moon shone down on the ruined buildings.

At Christmas his friends and relatives in Provo sent cards and said how they looked forward to his safe return in August. His mother wrote that nothing had changed in the neighborhood except that some new apartments would be built on Third West that summer. Christmas Eve he stood in the warm barracks room watching the women below digging in the deep snow for the candy bars and soap. He knew several of them by sight now, and somehow they had learned his name. They yelled, "Philip! Philip!" in a different German way until he came to the window and threw them something. One woman brought her two little girls.

He knew that the Germans still went hungry. He remembered the children pressing their red palms against the train windows and the boys he saw in the ruins cooking something in an old GI helmet. Every evening the nuns still came to get the mess-hall scraps for the orphanage. One night the green GI can tipped from their sled and he helped them gather the bones, pieces of dry bread and chunks of boiled potatoes from the snow. He said *bitte schön* when they thanked him, then stood there to watch the wind whip their black clothes as they went out through the gate. Behind them walked four GI's carrying their canvas bags. That night, staring up at the white ceiling, he prayed for the children and the nuns.

When he received his orders to return to the States for discharge, the section celebrated at the July party. Crowding around him, laughing, shouting, they forced him to drink one toast, and the schnaps was like fire in him. Each of the frauleins clamored to dance with him, embracing him, whirling him across the floor through the grey smoke-filled air, laughing. He felt the warm damp flesh of their hands, their soft breasts against his chest, their thighs against his. He had to sit down between dances once, squeeze his arms tight around his stomach and bend over against the feeling. The frauleins shrieked with laughter. "See what you been missing, kid?" Reynolds stood before him, his white bald head glistening with sweat. "You've missed a lot, kid — everything. You should re-enlist." The next day he bought $20 worth of soap and candy at the PX and gave it all to the women at the fence that night.

The big red-headed woman laughed and said, "You go home? You go home?"

Philip stared out through the vista-dome glass at the squares of light from the windows racing along the ground with the train. They passed Soldier Summit, where his father always stopped on their way back from fishing at Scofield Reservoir to buy him and his brothers a root beer. And then later, far below down Spanish Fork Canyon he saw the glimmering patches of light on the valley floor. Provo was the largest town in the valley and the only passenger train stop. The top of his mouth ached and his eyes stung. That afternoon when they crossed from Colorado into Utah and he saw the marker on the cliff, he had felt the same way.

He walked back to his car past the quiet passengers, got his suitcase, his clean summer uniform, and went to the men's room. The little blond boy followed him until his mother said, "Come back, honey. Don't bother the soldier." The rest room was empty. He pulled the curtain tight against the edges of the door, washed, shaved, brushed his teeth, combed his hair, and then put on his clean uniform and changed his socks. He wanted to take a good hot shower and put on clean shorts. He swallowed hard when he thought what a terrific surprise it would be for everybody when he walked up the front steps. Just as he started to polish his shoes, the conductor came in and sat down on the black leather couch. Grey cigar ashes caught in the wrinkles of his vest below the gold chain.

"Just get discharged, corporal?"

"Yes."

"Get overseas?"

"Germany."

"I could tell by the shoulder patch. That must have been real nice for a young buck like you."

Philip put the shoe-shine kit back in his suitcase.

"I was there after the first war." He puffed on his cigar, filling the room with blue smoke. "It was a great life then too, easy money on the black market, all the schnaps a man could want, and lots of frauleins." The conductor leaned back into the couch. "You can't beat those German frauleins can you, corporal, you just can't beat 'em." The conductor kept looking up at him, smiling.

"I guess not." He put his dirty uniform and socks in his suitcase and then washed his hands again.

"I guess not." The conductor laughed. "You know I still got the camera and binoculars I picked up over there. The Germans make the best optics in the world." The conductor stood up and followed him to the curtain. "Wish we could have shot the bull a little. Brings back a lot of memories." The conductor started to laugh again. "Oh, if the little wife only knew."

Philip went back to his seat, but he didn't sit down because he didn't want to wrinkle his uniform. They went through Springville. "Provo, Provo next stop." The conductor gripped his arm as he passed. Reaching up to get his duffel bag from the rack, Philip felt himself sway forward as the train slowed. His heart pounded in his throat and his hands sweat. They passed the Provo cemetery, the white crosses and tombstones gleaming in the moonlight.

The air was cool and dry when he stepped onto the station platform, the sky clear and full of stars and the moon. He turned to look up at the train as it pulled out. The little blond boy waved to him, the palm of his left hand pressed white against the window. The conductor leaned out over the half-door and said something, but there was too much noise. It was something about American girls. Philip set his duffel bag down and waved to the little blond boy until the long aluminum car curved around the bend and he vanished.

Philip stood there watching the red lights on the end of the last car until they disappeared into the darkness, then he picked up his bag and went inside the station. The agent, who knew his father, shook his hand through the window. "Glad to see you back, son," he said. "Pick up your bag anytime, no charge. Always glad to have you boys get home again safe and sound."

"Thank you, sir," he said.

Philip trembled when he got outside. He saw the Wasatch Mountains against the sky, the canopy of trees over the sidewalk up Third West, the neat houses and lawns, the silver water in the ditch. The suitcase slapping his leg, he could run the three blocks to Second South, turn the corner, go charging up the front steps, shout, "Mom! Dad! I'm home! I'm home!" but

he wouldn't. Already his body tingled, and he wanted to feel every step. He passed Webster's Corner Grocery store, the big yellow Camel cigarette sign painted on the side, and he stopped before the dark window to comb his hair. A robin flew away as he passed and the mist from the lawn sprays cooled him. The lawns were all cut for Sunday, and all up the street the lawn sprays were silver in the light from the porches and street lamps. After he crossed Fourth South he knew some of the people sitting on the porches and he nodded when they said hello but he didn't stop. Standing in a doorway, a girl in a white dress watched him walk by. He would know everybody after he turned on his street. Some of the older children played tag, a baby cried then hushed, and from somewhere came the sound of soft radio music. When he crossed Third South he saw the front of the Sixth Ward chapel and above the trees the dark blue silhouette of the mountains again.

Walking under the trees, he passed the sign advertising the new apartments his mother had written about. Roofs gone, and some walls, the bricks and plaster in piles of rubble, three houses were being torn down. The bathtubs, washbasins, sinks and toilets lay white under the single light burning near the piles of salvage. Then from the ruined houses he heard a girl laugh softly, laugh again, louder, and he stopped. A boy and girl, arms around each other, came out of the side door of the middle house. The girl stopped to pull her dress straight and brush it off with her hand. The boy lit a cigarette and then held it away from the girl when she reached for it. "Oh, come on, honey," she said, "you ought to be nice to me." He laughed, handed her the cigarette, pushed back her long red hair and kissed her on the neck. After he lit another cigarette, he put his arm around her shoulder and they crossed the street, her long hair shimmering.

Philip turned and walked slowly up to the corner, paused, turned, walked up Second South a few steps and put down his suitcase. Three houses further on the lawn spray was going under the big willow tree in front of their house. Across the street, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson sat on their front porch watching two boys playing catch in the street. The boys were Mark and Allen, his brothers. He saw his father come down their front steps and move the lawn sprinkler, then stand to say something to the Johnsons. His mother walked down the steps to his father and he put his arm around her shoulders. Reaching down, Philip picked up his suitcase, but stood for a moment. And then, under the dark green trees, the shadows filtering over him as he passed, he walked slowly toward them. His father still had his arm around his mother's shoulders.