THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

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TIMELESS CLASSICS

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Fears of Battle

A cloud of fog rose slowly from the cold earth. The rising sun revealed a camp of Union army soldiers stretched out on the hills. Last night the Yankees had seen the red gleam of enemy campfires on a distant hillside. Today, they were hoping for some action.

A tall soldier had gone down to the river to wash a shirt. When he came back he was waving the shirt like a flag.

"I just heard that we're moving out tomorrow, for sure," he said to a group of his comrades. "We're going up the river. Then we'll cut across and catch the Rebels from behind."

"It's a lie! That's all it is—another big lie!" said one private loudly. "I don't believe the darned old army's *ever* going to move.

I've got ready to move eight times in the last two weeks. And we ain't moved yet."

"Believe what you like, Wilson."

The tall soldier, Jim Conklin, was so sure of himself that the men started to believe him. One of them, a young private named Henry Fleming, listened silently while the others talked. Then he went to his tent, crawled inside, and lay on his bunk. He wanted to go over some new thoughts that had come to him lately.

Henry had dreamed of battle glory all his life. The great and bloody wars of his imagination had thrilled him with their sweep and fire. In his daydreams, he had always been a great hero. But Henry was not so sure anymore. Perhaps such battles belonged in the distant past, along with heavy crowns and high castles.

This war seemed different. The soldiers around him seemed more timid. Perhaps religion and education had erased the killer instinct in men.

For months Henry had been burning to enlist in the great war between the North and

the South. Tales of great marches, sieges, and conflicts filled the newspaper. He had longed to see it all. But his mother had discouraged him. She gave him hundreds of reasons why he was needed more on the farm than on the field of battle. Then one night the church bell rang to celebrate a great victory over the Confederate army. This news made him shiver with excitement. Later, he had gone down to his mother's room. "Ma," he said, "I'm going to enlist."

"Henry, don't you be a fool!" his mother had replied. Then she had covered her face with the quilt and turned away.

But the next morning he had walked into town and enlisted. When he returned home, his mother was milking a cow. "Ma, I've enlisted," he said to her shyly. There was a short silence. "The Lord's will be done, Henry," she said with a sigh. Then she turned back to the cow.

Weeks later, when he had stepped through the doorway in his new blue uniform, Henry had seen two tears run down his mother's cheeks. As she peeled potatoes, she said,

"You watch out, Henry. Take good care of yourself in this fighting business. Don't go thinking you can lick the whole Rebel army at the start—because you can't! You're just one little fellow among a whole lot of others.

"I've knit you eight pair of socks, and I've put in all your best shirts. I want my boy to be just as warm and comfortable as anybody in the army. When they get holes in them, I want you to send them back to me so I can darn them.

"And always be careful of the company you keep. There's lots of bad men in the army, Henry. The army makes them wild. They like nothing better than to teach a young fellow like you to drink and swear. Keep clear of them, Henry. I don't want you to ever do anything that you would be ashamed to let me know about.

"I don't know what else to tell you, Henry—except that you must never do any shirking on my account. If a time comes when you have to be killed or do a mean thing—why, Henry, don't think of anything except doing what's right.

"Now don't forget about the socks and the shirts, child. I've put a cup of blackberry jam in your bundle. I know you like it above all things. Goodbye, Henry. Watch out, and be a good boy."

He had, of course, been impatient during this speech. It had not been quite what he expected. He was annoyed. When he left the house, he felt a sense of relief.

But Henry looked back when he got to the gate. His mother was kneeling among the potato peels. Her face was stained with tears. She was sobbing. Bowing his head, he suddenly felt ashamed of himself.

On the train to Washington, Henry's spirit had soared. His regiment, the 304th, New York, was cheered all along the way. At every station, there were great spreads of bread and cold meats, pickles and cheese. Henry felt like a hero. Girls smiled at him. Old men patted and complimented him. He felt great strength growing within him.

But after the journey there were months of boring drill in a camp. He had thought that real war was a series of death struggles with little

time in between for sleep and meals. But the fact was that his regiment had not done much but sit still and try to keep warm.

Now, as Henry lay in his bunk, a little panic grew in his mind. As he thought about the upcoming battle, he saw terrible possibilities. Springing from his bunk, he began to pace nervously.

Jim Conklin and Wilson came into the tent. They were still arguing. "That's all right," said the tall soldier. "Believe me or not. Pretty soon you'll find out I was right."

Wilson grunted. "Well, you don't know everything in the world, do you?" he said.

"Didn't say I did," Conklin answered.

Henry stopped his pacing. "There's going to be a battle for sure—is that what you heard, Jim?" Henry asked.

"Of course there is," said the tall soldier.

"Thunder!" said the youth.

"Oh, you'll see fighting this time, my boy. Regular out-and-out *fighting*! Why, the cavalry already started to move out this morning."

Henry remained silent for a time. At last he spoke to the tall soldier. "How do you think

our regiment will do?"

"Oh, they'll fight all right, I guess, after they once get into it," said the other.

"Think any of the boys will run?"

"Oh, there may be a few. There are some who run off in any regiment. Especially when they first go under fire," said Jim.

"Did you ever think you might run yourself, Jim?" he asked. Henry laughed as if he meant it as a joke.

The tall soldier waved his hand. "Well, if a whole lot of boys started to run, why, I suppose I'd run, too. And if I once started to run, I'd run like the devil. Make no mistake. But if everybody was standing and fighting—why, I'd stand and fight, too. By jiminy, I would. I'll bet on it."

Henry was grateful for Jim's words.

The next morning, the soldiers learned that Jim Conklin's rumor had been wrong. The regiment wasn't going anywhere that day. Some of the men sneered at Jim.

Now Henry had more time to think about his problem. The worst part was that he was afraid to tell anybody how he felt. As the days

passed, he grew more afraid that he might run from the coming battle.

By nightfall, the regiment had set up camp in a field. Henry went off by himself and lay down in the grass. The tender blades pressed softly against his cheek.

As he lay there, Henry thought about home. He would have given anything to be making the rounds from the barn to the house. Enlisting had been a mistake. He felt he was not cut out to be a soldier.

Then Henry heard the grass rustling. When he turned his head, he saw the loud soldier coming. He called out, "Oh, Wilson!"

Wilson looked down. "Why, hello there. Is it you, Henry? What are you doing here?"

"Oh, just thinking," said the youth.

Wilson sat down and began to talk about the coming battle. "Oh, we've got 'em now! We'll lick 'em good!" He went on like this, getting more and more excited.

"Oh, you're going to be a real hero, I suppose," said Henry.

"I don't know," said Wilson. "I suppose I'll do as well as the rest."



"How do you know you won't run?"

"Run?" said the loud one. "*Run?* Of course not!" He laughed.

"Well," said Henry, "lots of good men have thought they were going to do great things before the fight. But when the time came, they ran."

"Oh, that's true enough, I suppose," replied the other. "But *I'm* not going to run. The man that bets on my running will lose his money, that's all." The loud soldier nodded confidently.

"Oh, shucks!" said the youth. "I guess you must think you're the bravest man in the world!"

"No, I don't," said Wilson angrily. "I didn't say that. I said I was going to do my share of fighting—that's what I said. And I *am*, too." He glared at the youth for a moment and then got up and walked away.

When Wilson had left, Henry felt absolutely alone. No one else was worried. He seemed to be the only one. Slowly, he went to his tent and stretched out on a blanket. For a long time he stared at the red reflection of a fire on the tent wall. Finally, he fell asleep.

TIMELESS CLASSICS

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

The Civil War battlefields are nothing like Henry Fleming had imagined them to be. Isn't it the duty of every living creature to save its own life? Yet Henry is afraid to return to his regiment. His comrades are sure to sneer at his cowardice.

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