Homecoming

The thing about the landscape I remember from that day was the decay of the grass. Perhaps only because of the message that was delivered.

The weather was hot; sweltering. Which was unusual for the tucked away port in the Pacific Northwest that constantly sucked cool breezes from the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The heat, and nerves, kept me constantly fluttering the folds of my new sailor top dress which seemed uncomfortably tight layered over my fitted waspie. My stockings suffocated my moist legs and I worried my “Victory” red lipstick would be sweated away before long. Yes, it was boiling. And yet, we still waited outside.

Leaning against the rail of the stairwell, I dabbed at my forehead as my younger brother gazed out over the banister that imprisoned him on the porch. “Sis, fetch me some lemonade,” he commanded.

Fetch it yourself, I wanted to say. But my mother’s quick glance chided me. I was reminded that in the 40s a young lady didn’t have that right.

Quickly, not wanting to miss the first sight of our older brother‘s gallant return, I completed his request.

“Here,” I shoved the already perspiring glass in his hands and returned to my perch.

We waited in silence. No one wanted to be the one speaking when the cab came into view to deliver our war hero.

The muffled rumble announced his arrival and my tummy whirled with the billow of dust that preceded the slowing black Model T.

My big brother would expect me to fly down the stairs and be the first to greet him. I was torn between giving into that childish impulse or showing him that now that I was 16, I was a reserved and mature young lady. So I patiently waited until the car stopped at the bottom of the stairs. Then I bounded the stairs two at a time to reach the awaited vehicle. My excitement uncontained, I ripped the back passenger door open to collect my idol.

The black shoe and slacks that stretched out of the car did not reveal what I expected a military man to wear at all. But I supposed he dressed up for his big return. A black hat shaded his face and as he stood, he was much taller than I remembered. I could not recognize one inch of my big brother. The sun caught his features and I gasped, “Father Mike?”

He reached back into the cab and emerged with a triangular folded flag, “I’m so very sorry, my child.”