

## THE RUPTURED DUCK

He wore a ruptured duck in his lapel, and, in a way, it fit him, for he was lame, too. Bill had lost something in the war--- not an arm or leg, but something worse ( if something could be worse) , ambition.

It was most clearly seen in his eyes; they had a strange quality, into which could be read, with no difficulty, reproach, bitterness and aloof withdrawal.

People did not like meeting Bill. They said, it was too much like facing your conscience, when you had done something wrong. They recalled, with a twinge at their heartstrings, the "happy, go-lucky kid" who, just a few years before, had talked vivaciously of the post-war, after he had "demolished those Japs". They remembered, with a queer feeling in their stomachs, the Bill who had struggled through the depression, cleaning offices at night, so that he could go to college by day. That Bill was going to conquer the world, discover new horizons, be famous---be somebody.

At eight, Bill's mind was already made up. No doubt, no question about it, at all. He was to be a renowned scientist. At <sup>was</sup> eighteen, he could not afford laboratory fees, so he became a history major.

Odd, how fate manipulates the strings of fortune. When war broke out, he needed one semester for graduation, but Bill was never one to shirk, what he termed, his "duty", so, within the month, he enlisted. They saw him off at the station, early that morning of January seventh, 1942, and all sternly advised him to "give them hell for us, Bill". They watched him force a smile, laughing as he responded, "will proceed as ordered".

In the air corps, he rose from private to captain, received

several commendations for valorous service in the field of battle, and learned more in four years than he had learned in his life.

He had definitely changed. When he returned, he was different---, he was the conquering hero, all right, but this was not the way he had planned it.

Bill did not do much of anything, the first few weeks after he had come back, but then no one expected that he should, after what he had gone through. Bill said he wanted a little vacation, figured he would "take it easy, for a while".

In the meantime, the Block parties ended, the bands stopped playing "Johnny Comes Marching Home Again", and the "Welcome Home" signs were removed.

No, Bill did not do much of anything the first few weeks, or the first few months, or the first few years.

They would see him on a park bench, sometimes, head down, shoulders hunched, expression intent. All Bill would say was that he was "oh, just thinking". And so, he sits, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year...

A case of "unsatisfactory readjustment"? Not really. "Weak nerves"? Perhaps. Most of them agree, as they watch Bill "just thinking", that something else was ruptured, besides the duck he wears in his lapel.

None of them know, for sure. They do know that they did not like meeting Bill. It was too much like facing your conscience, when you had done something wrong.

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