

THE DOORMAN

A Short Story

by

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THE DOORMAN

The blast of air was hot and dry this time; a year ago it had been hot and wet. A year. A year to unload a cargo of moisture. A year to make room for a cargo of guilt.

Everyone kept their seats after the passenger door opened. They'd been lectured about the in-processing procedure for a full thirty minutes before landing.

A pimply spec-five¹ came aboard, clipboard under his arm. "Ya'll listen up!" he said. "Cain't nobody git off till I get this here manifest called. Sooner ya'll gimme a 'yup,' the sooner ya'll kin get back to the land of the big milkshake."

Apart from a few whoops and cheers from the back of the 707, most of the soldiers looked at the clerk the way they always did when they were being talked at by REMPs². That was what REMPs did, they talked at you, not to you. McGill dosed in the heat. It would be awhile before his name was called.

"McGill!"

No response.

"McGill! Nicolas D. PFC³!"

McGill came awake. "Here."

The spec-five walked to McGill's row. "Ya'll got some kinda attitude?"

¹ Spec-Five--Specialist Fifth Class; equivalent in pay grade but not responsibility of a buck sergeant.

² REMP--Rear Echelon Maintenance Personnel; generally held in contempt by battle-seasoned troops.

³ PFC--Private First Class.

McGill blinked a few times. "No."

"No? 'No' is all you got to say?"

"No, I don't have an attitude," McGill said.

"Hurry the fuck up!" a voice from the back said. "We're roasting in here."

"Like I give two shits!" the spec-five said. "On yer feet, PFC!"

McGill looked at him out of the tops of his eyes.

"I said, on yer feet, Pee-Eff-Cee!"

McGill stood up. He'd been in a window seat and had to step over his seatmates to get to the aisle.

The spec-five grew silent.

McGill opened the overhead storage bin and retrieved his dress green tunic and ditty bag. He put the tunic on and tightened his neck tie, then removed the overseas cap that he'd stuck under the epaulet. He pushed past the spec-five with slow and deliberate movements, his expression passive.

"Hey, you cain't..." the spec-five said.

McGill didn't look back and didn't stop. He walked through the exit past the two MPs⁴ that had been stationed there. That they did not stop him was less a factor of McGill's physique--which was considerable--than his manner.

He had survived the Tet Offensive of 1968. The worst year of the war. 14,594 U.S. battlefield deaths. Five thousand more than in the years preceding and following. 87,388 wounded in action. Thirty thousand more missing limbs, blinded eyes, sucking chest wounds, perforated bowels, shattered bones, and other assorted damage than in the adjacent years.

⁴ MP--Military Police.