



SOLDIER'S HOME

— BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY —

RETOLD BY SARA SIMPSON

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Soldier's Home (1925)
By Ernest Hemingway
Retold by Sara Simpson

Before World War I, Krebs was going to college in Kansas. There is a picture of him and his frat brothers, and they all look exactly the same. He joined the Marines in 1917, fought in Germany, and came home in the summer of 1919. There is a picture of Krebs and another marine standing next to the Rhine River with two German girls. The girls weren't very pretty, and you can't see the river in the picture.

When the first soldiers, men who had been drafted, came back from the, there were parades and celebrations. Krebs never got to see any of that. He was one of the soldiers who came back very late after the war. By the time he got back to his hometown in Oklahoma, nobody cared about the soldiers anymore. There weren't any parades.

Krebs fought in many famous battles in the war. At first, he didn't want to talk about the war. Later, he wanted to talk, but people didn't want to listen. The soldiers who came home before him had talked about all the horrible things they had seen, and people back home didn't want to know any more. He had to lie to get people to pay attention, like his own reality hadn't been enough. He started to hate the war and hate himself for lying. The lies about the war made his real memories cheap.

The lies he told weren't big lies. He would tell people stories about the war that he had heard from other men, but make it sound like the stories had happened to him. When he went to play pool with old friends from before the war, they told stories they had heard about German girls chaining themselves to machine guns. Krebs's stories sounded boring compared to that.

Krebs felt sick to his stomach every time he told a small lie to another soldier who had fought in the war. The truth was, **he had been badly, sickeningly frightened all the time** during the war. He had lost everything important to him when he went away to war.

During this time, late in the summer of 1919, he slept late every morning. When he got up, he walked to the library to get a book, went home and ate lunch, then

read his book on the front porch until he got bored. In the hot afternoon, he walked to the pool room. It was dark and cool there. **He loved to play pool.** In the evening, he played his clarinet, walked around the town some more, then went to bed.

Even though most of the town didn't care, Krebs's mother and two younger sisters still thought he was a hero. His mother would have served him breakfast in bed every day if that's what he wanted. She came into his room sometimes and asked him to tell her about the war, but Krebs knew she didn't really understand. His father tried to pretend that nothing had changed.

Before the war, Krebs was not allowed to drive the family car. His father sold real estate and wanted the car at home so he could use it to drive clients at any time. His father's life hadn't changed at all since he went away.

Nothing about the town had changed, **except that the young girls had grown up.** He didn't understand girls and all their drama, but he liked to look at them. There were lots of pretty girls, but he felt too tired to go on dates. The girls all had short hair; a few years ago, only girls who smoked or slept around had short hair. But times had changed. He liked to watch the girls walk by as he sat on the front porch. He liked the way they walked.

As much as he liked looking at the girls as pretty objects to watch, not as real people. **They were too complicated.** Krebs liked the idea girlfriend, but he didn't want to have to talk and listen and go on dates. **He did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn't worth it.**

He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He didn't really need a girlfriend. The army taught him that. Lots of the guys took pictures with girls and made it look like they had girlfriends, but they didn't really. It was strange. Guys would brag that they didn't need a girlfriend and didn't want a commitment. Then, they'd get a girlfriend and brag that they loved her and couldn't live without her. Both were lies. Eventually, any guy can get a girlfriend. It doesn't matter what girl, as long as there is one.

Krebs would have liked a girlfriend if she didn't want to talk. He knew that wasn't realistic, though. He liked the French and German girls. Since they didn't speak the same language, there wasn't so much talking. It was easy. Thinking about French and German girls made him think about France and Germany. He liked Germany. He didn't want to come back to Oklahoma. He wished he could have stayed there.

He sat on the front porch and watched the pretty girls walking along. They were prettier than the girls in France or Germany, but they didn't understand what he had been through. He didn't want to get into a relationship. It was too much work, and he was finally starting to feel better.

He was reading a book about the war. He was reading about the battles he had been in. It was the most interesting thing he had ever read. He felt like he was finally learning about the war. **He had been a good soldier.** That was important.

One morning, about a month after he got home, his mother came into his room and sat down on his bed.

"I talked to your father, Harold," she said, "and he says you can use the car in the evening if you want."

"Really?" Krebs said, still half asleep. "He says I can use the car? I'll bet you made him do it."

"No, it was your father's idea," she said. "Will you come eat breakfast with us today?"

"I'll get dressed and come down," he said.

He washed, shaved, put on clothes, and went downstairs to the dining room. His little sister came in with the newspaper.

"Harry! You're a sleepyhead. Do you ever get up?" she said.

Krebs looked at her. He liked her. She was his favorite sister. He took the newspaper and started reading the sports page while he ate his cereal.

"Harold!" his mother said. "Be careful with the paper. Don't mess it up. Your father doesn't like it when the paper is messed up before he gets to read it."

"I won't mess it up," he said.

His sister sat down at the table and watched him.

"We're going to play softball today," she said.

"Good," he said. "How's your throwing arm?"

"Good. I'm going to be the pitcher," she said. "I tell everyone you taught me. The other girls aren't very good. And I tell them you're my sweetheart. You're my sweetheart, right, Harry?"

"You bet," he said.

"You're not just saying that because I'm your little sister, are you?" she said. "If I were older and not your sister, would I really be your sweetheart?"

"You're my sweetheart now," he said.

"Will you always love me?" she said.

"Sure," he said.

"Will you come watch me play softball?" she said.

"Maybe," he said.

Krebs's mother came in with a plate of pancakes, eggs, and bacon.

"Go play, Helen," she said to Krebs's sister. "I need to talk to Harold."

She sat down across the table from Krebs.

"Have you decided what you're going to do yet, Harold?" Now that you've had some time to rest after coming back," she said.

"No," he said.

"Don't you think it's about time" you thought about your future?" she asked. "God has a plan for everyone in his Kingdom."

"I'm not in his Kingdom," Krebs said.

"I'm so worried about you," his mother said. "I know you were around a lot of sinful behavior when you were in the war, especially sinful behavior with women. I know how weak men are. My father was in the Civil War, and he told me what war is like. I pray for you all day long, Harold."

Krebs didn't look at her. He just stared at the food on his plate.

"Your father is worried, too," she said. "He thinks you don't have a plan for your life. Charley Simmons is the same age as you. He has a good job and is about to get married. All the boys who came home are getting jobs and getting married. Boys like that are a credit to the community."

Krebs said nothing.

"You know we love you. I'm telling you this for your own good. We want you to make your own decisions, but they need to be good decisions. Take out the car. Go riding with some nice girls. Have fun. But you need to settle down and get a job. We don't care what kind of job you get, but you have to get some kind of job. Your father asked me to tell you to go talk to him at his office today."

"Is that all?" Krebs said.

"Yes. That's all. I'm your mother. Don't you love me?" she said.

"I don't love anybody," Krebs said.

His mother started to cry.

Krebs wanted his mother to understand what he had been through. He wanted her to understand that he had been changed by the terrible things that happened in the war. But she couldn't understand. It wasn't her fault; she had never been to war. He had hurt her. He touched her arm. She was crying with her head in her hands.

"I didn't mean it," he said. "I was just angry. I really do love you," he said.

His mother couldn't stop crying. She kept shaking her head "no."

"Mother, please. Please believe me," Krebs said.

Finally, she looked up at him.

"All right," she said, "I believe you."

Krebs kissed his mother's hair. She looked at him.

"I'm your mother," she said. "I held you next to my heart when you were a tiny baby."

Krebs felt sick to his stomach.

