

ALWAYS A MARINE

by

Ernest Bywater
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Author's Note: I am an Australian and naturally write as an Australian. I felt moved to write this story about a member of the USMC as I don't think the US Military are getting the recognition they deserve from their own government. Being poor, this is the only way I can honor them for their service and dedication. I know I haven't earned the right to say it, but Semper fi.

My special thanks to Chuck for help in checking terms, procedures, and US spelling. Any remaining errors are mine.

ALWAYS A MARINE

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Café Conflict.....	5
Who Is He?.....	8
Visitors.....	10
The Morgue.....	11
The Sheriff's Office.....	13
Of Mice and Men.....	14
The Funeral Home.....	15
Funeral.....	18

Ernest Bywater

CAFÉ CONFLICT

The little bell on the front door of the little country café jingled. The café owner and the girl on the counter moved closer to the door to the back room, ready to flee. The three mid teen schoolgirls sitting at a table in the back of the customer area looked up, and the face of the youngest went white as her fear showed. She turned and checked for a way out, even though she knew there wasn't one. An old man was sitting at the next table, he saw the girls' reaction and turned to see what caused it.

He saw six young men who'd just walked into the little country café. They looked like trouble that just found what they wanted. They all looked to be eighteen to twenty years old or so, with shoulder length hair and mean expressions. Their clothes were dirty and cheap, except for the headbands they wore. They all had the same headband, and it was clean. Their boots were cheap and look like they've never been washed or polished since purchase. They swaggered as they moved down the café. Their leader said, "There you are, bitch. I told you to be at the club house an hour ago for your initiation fucking by the members. Now you get to be fucked by the dogs as well, and all on film for selling."

The youngest girl, gulped, and said, "I told you I never wanted to be in your club. I never asked or had anything to do with your people."

"What you want has nothing to do with it, bitch. We want you, and we'll have you. I think we'll take your two friends as extra fun, too."

The old man stood and turned to face the young men. He had a bent back and only stood as tall as the chin of the shortest of the young men, their leader. The old man limped as he moved into the middle of the path beside the tables. He smiled, and said, "Go home, kid."

Everyone looked at the old man in his worn out cheap clothes. He was well known around town and all called him 'gramps.' One young kid called him that when he first arrived in town ten years ago. He looked old then, and now looked ancient. They all knew he was retired, had been for years, and he lived on a meager pension. But no one knew where the pension came from or what he used to do for work.

The lead youth laughed as he pulled a flick knife out of his pocket and opened it. "You're dead, old man." He moved forward as the rest of his pack pulled out knives and followed him. The café owner was shocked when the old man smiled as his only response.

The leader of the young men reached the old man and swung his knife to stab him. The old man belied his age as he moved fast to avoid the blade. He swung his left arm down to knock the knife aside as his right arm moved towards the youth's head. All heard the snap as the young man's head was thrown backwards. The old man grabbed the youth's arm and pulled to the left as he stepped past the falling body. All were shocked by the action, as it's nothing like what they expected.

The old man was now amongst the youths and a blur of action. He was so fast that none of the witnesses could see what happened, except the youths keep falling down. One went crashing back into the front doors. The sound made the other ten youths waiting outside turn and charge into the café, drawing weapons as they ran - knives and pistols.

The old man had hold of the last of the first group of youths as the rest entered the café. He held the youth in front of him as he took the pistol out of the belt of the youth and pointed it at the rest of the gang. The old man yelled out, "Girls, hit the floor." They all slid off their chairs and hit the floor. They weren't quite all the way down when the sound of gunfire filled the café.

Aftermath

The shooting ended and the girls looked up, no one was standing. The café owner had already phoned for the police and ambulance. The youngest girl stood up and looked at the mess in the café. She went to where 'gramps' was lying, and was surprised to see he was still alive.

He looked up and saw her. He smiled at her and reached for her hand, squeezing it when she moved close enough for him to take it. He said, "Tell them I did it. I held the line against the enemy. As I swore, I fought all enemies, foreign and domestic." With that, he coughed and sighed. His head rolled to the side and his hand went slack as he died. She sat there and cried while she continued to hold his hand.

Sirens sounded. Car tires screeched. Car doors slammed. Running feet were heard to enter the café. The girl didn't look up until she heard a voice say, "Shit, Sheriff, it's a massacre in here. Better get the coroner over here." She looked up and saw a Sheriff's Deputy standing in the doorway as he looked at the bodies that littered the café.

Deputy Jackson looked at the mess, and spotted the girl beside the old man. He wasn't happy with the lack of expression on her face. He was sure she was in extreme shock, so he went to her and was gentle as he took the dead man's hand out of hers. He didn't want her to have to walk out through the blood on the floor, so he picked her up and carried her out to the ambulances parked in the road.

He handed her over to one of the ambulance crew, and said, "I think she's in shock. There's another two like her inside. I'll bring them out to you." The paramedic nodded and took the girl from him. He took her to his ambulance as the deputy went back into the café. Deputy Jackson took only a few minutes to carry out other girls, the owner, and the girl who worked the counter. The paramedics treated them all for shock.

The county forensic team turned up just as the county coroner arrived. Both groups entered the café together. The coroner checked and declared each one dead, and the forensic team started processing the crime scene. It took a long time to do it all and clear the bodies out.

WHO IS HE?

Sheriff James sat at his desk, swearing, as he listened to the radio call for assistance at the County Café - surprised at a call from there, as it's always so calm and quiet. It's located at the wrong end of the town's business district and gets only just enough business to stay open, most of it being the local farmers stopping for a chat on the way in or out of town. The town never had much business, and even less in the slowed economic climate. If it wasn't for the high turnover at the truck stop and tavern at the exit from the highway five miles out of town, the county would be bankrupt. Those two operations were all that kept the town alive. But they came at the cost of being almost the only need for a County Sheriff's Office, over ninety-five percent of all calls came from the highway stop. So many, the duty vehicle parked out behind the truck stop to make it easier and faster to answer calls. But eighteen months ago that changed, and now half the calls come from in town.

Eighteen months ago a group of several rough looking young men moved into town. And they wasted no time in recruiting all of the bad boys and layabouts in the county. They had been busy trying to take over full control of the town since. No one knows why they picked the town, and no one liked it, but there's little that could be done until they are caught in the act of committing a major crime. The members of the gang were easy to spot, as they all wore a headband with a symbol that looked like the Nazi cross, but distorted and tipped over on an angle.

It worried the Sheriff that a call came in from the café at the end of town furthest from the highway, as that can only be trouble with the gang of young hoods. What worried him most was he couldn't leave the office, due to his left leg being in a cast. It had been broken when his car was run off the road by someone in a stolen car. The matter was still being investigated, but he was sure it was one of the gang, as he'd been on their back investigating the beating of a farmer on the edge of town.

It only took a few minutes for the first car to arrive at the scene, but it was a worrying time. Deputy Jackson was first at the scene. That was good news, as being an ex soldier he could handle anything the gang could dish out. Also, he's one of the few who wears his armor.

James was now very worried as Jackson's just on the scene and was radioing in, "Shit, Sheriff, it's a massacre in here. Better get the coroner over here." James wasted no time asking questions. He could tell from the tone of Jackson's voice, it's all over but the clean up. James turned from the radio to his desk, picked up the phone, and called for the coroner. He called his only Scene of Crime Investigator and sent her over. Then he called the state police, to have them send their people too. Then he to sit and wait until someone told him something.

Several minutes later, Jackson called in and briefed him on the case. The only good news being sixteen of the nineteen young hoods were dead, and that included the original group who started it. The bad news was the death of the old man. The Scene of Crime Investigator gave Jackson the old man's pocket contents when they took the body to the morgue. Not much in there, just a few notes, some coins, and some bills for his house over in Cedar Road. No driver's license or other common forms of identification, not even a credit card or any bank details. The bills are in the name of Johnny Reb, so the sheriff entered it into his computer and he got the expected results. No record in the state records of such a legal name, a few as nicknames. But none are of the right age. A few more key strokes and the search request was extended to the federal computers. He radioed Jackson to get fingerprints, a DNA sample, and to check the man's house for anything to help identify him.

Almost two hours later, Jackson walked in and handed over the card with the fingerprints and the plastic bags with DNA samples. He sat down, and said, "Everything I can find in the house says Johnny Reb. I did find some letters from Benson, the lawyer. I went there and found out some lawyer in Washington paid him to pay the bills and give the old man cash when he wanted some. Benson kept records and sent an account once a month. No phone numbers, just a mail box. But a fair sized retainer in trust, so he's not worried. He's written off to get new instructions and information for a funeral. That should be a few days before he gets a reply." James put the DNA stuff in the special box they had for sending stuff off to the State Police and FBI labs. He scanned the fingerprints and put them in the system as a John Doe ID request. That's all they could do, so they closed the file, for the moment.

VISITORS

Three days after the big fight in the café and Sheriff James was in his office checking the monthly report for the County Commissioners, when his door opened and someone walked in. He looked up and saw two men in military fatigues. He said, "Afternoon, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" He looked them over while speaking. He was surprised to notice the collar insignia of one was three stars, and he wondered what a general wanted in the town. Then he noticed they had USMC insignia, and that cleared away all his previous thoughts about Army exercises in the area, something they did now and then.

The General said, "Afternoon, Sheriff, I believe you have a John Doe corpse you need identified. We'd like a look at it, please." He sounded nice, but the tone had command orders all the way through it.

James rolled his wheel chair over to the radio and called for Jackson to come to the office. He turned back to the men, and said, "I broke my leg a few weeks back and not allowed out of the office. I'm just glad the doc let me out of the hospital at all. Deputy Jackson will be here in a few minutes, to take you to the morgue. Want a drink while you wait?"

Both the General and the Master Gunnery Sergeant declined, and the two men sat down to wait for their guide. James shrugged and went back to checking the report. A few minutes later the door opened to let in Jackson. As he went to make the introductions, James realised his visitors hadn't introduced themselves. He smiled, and said, "General, this is Deputy Sheriff Jackson. He'll show you where the morgue is and will help you identify the man, if you can. He'll also note the details for our records." He was about to say something else, when the General smiled and waved his thanks as he headed for the door. James smiled at them and waved Jackson out after them. For a few minutes he sat there and wondered just what was happening.

THE MORGUE

Jackson parked outside the basement entrance to the small morgue under the little county hospital. The sedan in military colors parked beside his car, and they all got out of the cars. He noticed the General had a file in his hand as he got out. He led them into the morgue and rang the bell for an orderly to help them.

A little later, Jackson said to the orderly, "Which drawer has 'gramps' in it?" The orderly went to the little bank of drawers and pulled out number six. The three men gathered around the sheet covered body and the orderly turned the sheet back to show the face. Jackson kept a close watch on the two military men.

The General looked down at the face, and turned to the sergeant. He gave a small nod and lifted the sheet to look at the left arm. They both gave it a brief look over, then moved around to look at the right knee. The General opened up the file and examined a photo as he examined the knee. After a few minutes, they both nodded to each other.

The General turned and walked out the door, he took out his mobile phone as he walked. The sergeant turned to Jackson, and said, "Deputy, that's Johnny Reb, a Marine who'll be sadly missed. His full name is Master Gunnery Sergeant Rudolph Eugene Brooks, a retired Marine. No one knows when or where he got the nickname, or why, but all who knew him called him by his nickname of Johnny Reb. We'll arrange for his transfer and burial in Arlington."

Jackson looked up at the last sentence. In a very cold voice, he said, "You aren't taking that man anywhere. If you want to steal him from us, you better go and get the entire Marine Corps to help you. And you better be ready for a fight when you come back. He's part of this town now, and we aren't letting him go without a fight."

The sergeant backed up at the cold venom in the deputy's voice. He was stunned by the response. He shook his head, and said, "But you didn't even know his name, why so determined he stays here?"

Ernest Bywater

“He arrived about ten years ago and started hanging out around the town. He helped people when they needed it, and he asked for nothing in return. He became a part of this town, and has been for the last ten years. The kids started calling him 'gramps,' and he liked it, so it stuck. That's all he ever wanted us to call him, so that's all we called him. We don't push our noses into other people's affairs, so we didn't. We now need his legal name so we can put it on the headstone. We're taking up a collection to pay for his funeral. He lived with us, and he died for us; he stays here.” The sergeant stood and looked at Jackson for a few minutes, then turned and went out and spoke to the General. He returned and thanked Jackson for his help before he left. Jackson waited until they left before going to his car, and going back to his patrol. He called the Sheriff with the details of what was said at the morgue.

After a short talk, and another phone call, the two Marines drove off in their car.

THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The General walked into the Sheriff's office and was about to speak, when James held out a photocopy of the file on the fight at the café. He gave James an odd look, only to be told, "In a small country town, a man with the family name of James and parents who thinks it's funny to call him Jim, he soon learns to think ahead." The General gave a smile in return and nodded as he read the file.

After reading the file, he handed it to the sergeant, and said, "OK, I can see why you want to keep him. And all before you knew who you had. So we'll let him stay. But we're giving him a Marine burial."

James nodded, "Yeah, that's OK. Why the big interest by you?"

"Johnny Reb was well known after a lifetime of active service. We've missed him since he retired back in the late eighties, medical grounds. His many wounds and injuries caught up with him and he failed his annual physical. After leaving base, he vanished, and we've been looking for him for twenty years. But he knew how to hide, and did so. We also went looking for his wife, in the hope he was nearby. But she vanished in the late sixties. The report said she was pregnant when she filed for divorce. But that's all we had, and nothing since. He has some cousins still living near where he was born, but they've not seen him since he left to join the Marines at eighteen. We checked anyway, and he wasn't up there. Now we've found him, we wanted him back. You still need him here, so we'll leave him be." James nodded and the General turned to leave. In the doorway, he turned back, "I'll have someone contact you about organizing the funeral. Is the Saturday after this coming one going to be OK with your coroner?"

James smiled, "If it wasn't, it will be now." The General smiled and nodded. He left, followed by his sergeant.

OF MICE AND MEN

The Saturday after the visit by the general a young girl, Jan Hollings, visited her grandmother with her father, her mother died in an accident several years earlier. Jan and her father lived and worked in town, but her grandmother lived on the family farm with her two uncles. The farm was about fifteen miles out of town.

Jan said, "Gran, I'm sorry, but we won't be out to visit you next Saturday as we'll be attending the funeral of Gramps, I knew him better than most, and have to say goodbye." The old lady smiled and nodded. She accepted that her granddaughter needed to say goodbye to this man she'd known in town, like many of the children did. The three girls at the café had been asked to stand for his family and are her friends.

Jan's father, Peter Hollings, said, "Oh, have you heard, they know his real name. He's a retired Marine, Master Gunnery Sergeant Rudolph Eugene Brooks, also known as Johnny Reb." He stopped, as his mother-in-law's face went white. He was very concerned, and he asked, "What's wrong, Ma White?"

She gulped, and replied, "I once knew a Marine Corporal Rudy Brooks, and his nickname was Yonee Reb. I've got to go and see if it's him. You better take me into town; now, while it's on our minds."

They all got up and got in the car, and drove into town.

THE FUNERAL HOME

They arrived at the funeral home and found a Marine Honor Guard on duty around the casket. They joined the line of Marines waiting to view the body, and made their slow way forward as the line moved. Several minutes later the small family group reached the casket. They looked odd as the rest of the line today were off duty Marines. The majority of the townspeople had been by yesterday.

Ma White looked down at the body and shook her head real slow. She stood there for a few minutes and gave the body a close look all over, even gave a small wry smile when she noticed the wedding ring on his left hand. She looked up at the Gunnery Sergeant standing behind the coffin, and asked, "What are those medals, Sergeant?"

He gave a small smile and said, "Navy Cross, Silver Star, and Bronze Star, ma'am. Johnny Reb was a real hero, ma'am, and always there to help those who needed him."

She nodded her thanks as she looked around the room, and moved over to where a Master Gunnery Sergeant was standing. Her family followed her over. She waited for him to finish with the corporal he was talking to. When he turned to her, she asked, "Are you in charge?" He nodded. "A couple of points, Sergeant. One, I know you and the other don't know any better, but his nickname wasn't pronounced as Johnny, like it came from the name John. Although that's where it started from, because of the accent used where he was born and grew up, it was pronounced as Yonee, with a 'Y' sound and not a 'J.' He was born up in Lancaster County in Pennsylvania and was from Amish descent. He had the nickname since he was about ten years old."

All those around her stared at her as she spoke. Her family were more shocked than anyone else. After a moment, the sergeant asked, "I gather you knew him well, ma'am?"

"Better than most, but not as well as I thought. I'd not realised how much certain things meant to him. Some more than others."

Ernest Bywater

"I'm not sure I understand, ma'am."

"You know he joined the Marines when he was eighteen, and got married when he was twenty?" The sergeant's eye's went wide as he wondered if she was who he thought she might be. He nodded. "To Rudy, the phrase 'Once a Marine, always a Marine' was something that had seeped into the very marrow of his bones before he finished basic training. As was the oath he took when he signed up. Since they had come before his wedding vows, they had precedence as far as he was concerned. And that lead to the break up of his marriage as he put the Corps before his family. Anyway, that's not what I wanted to speak with you about. His wedding ring. That's a family heirloom that's over six hundred years old. It needs to be taken off his finger for his family."

"Well, ma'am, that's an interesting point. I know of a many times where he said he was never going to take it off." All in the room seemed to understand this was something important, and silence descended on the room, not a sound was heard except their talk.

She smiled, "That's true. But he isn't going to take it off. You are. His actual words all those years ago were, 'Once a Marine, always a Marine. Once married, always married. This ring will never leave my hand while I'm alive.' Well, he's not alive. So the oath has been kept and it can come off now." While she talked, she'd reached into her dress pocket. She pulled her hand out and held up a ring on a chain, "It needs to be put with this, it's mate, and given to his granddaughter." All in the room are stunned by this revelation, especially her family.

The sergeant smiled at this. The general and he had been both right and wrong. Right in that Johnny Reb had found and followed his wife, wrong in thinking either had gone back to Lancaster County. He said, "Granddaughter, ma'am?"

"Yes, Jan is his granddaughter. I didn't know it when we broke up, but I was already pregnant. I filed the divorce papers before I found out. By then I was too proud to go back to him, and had already met and fallen in love with Jim White, the man I married after the divorce was finalized. My daughter was Rudy's child and my sons were Jim's children, but he treated them all as his own. My daughter is dead, but

she had a child before then, and Jan is Rudy's granddaughter. I had no idea that Rudy was in the area. And even less on how he found me, but I'm sure he was living around here as he'd found me. Jim was listed as the father for all my children, but Rudy may have suspected the truth, I don't know."

"Thank you, ma'am, for that information. We can now finalize many things for Rudy." He turned to Jan, and said, "Miss, do you want your grandfather's wedding ring?"

Gulping hard, she replied, "An heirloom that old. I best have it to pass on in the family. Thank you. Please remove it for me." The sergeant smiled and walked to the coffin. He bent over, and a few minutes later he was back with the ring. He took the chain off Mrs White, opened the clasp, and placed the ring on it with its mate, then handed them all to Jan. She took them and put them away in a button down pocket of her slacks.

"Miss, during the week some people will be calling on you to finalise Master Gunnery Sergeant Brooks' will and other legal matters, as well as deliver what personal effects that are left." She nodded her acceptance of this, although she wasn't sure she understood it all yet, as she still hadn't fully accepted her relationship to 'gramps.'

FUNERAL

The day of the funeral dawned bright and clear, as was forecast - a nice sunny day. The funeral was set for one in the afternoon so those who needed to travel had time to get there. A preacher from Rudolph Brooks home town had arrived by horse and cart the day before, he'd been invited to hold the funeral service. In one of those odd quirks of fate, he was a close younger cousin who Ruddy sometimes looked after before he left his home community.

The little town church was way too small for the expected number of attendees, so a grave-side funeral was organized. All the town shops closed early so the people could go home and get ready for the funeral. By ten thirty the town was empty and quiet, as everyone was at home getting ready. By a quarter past twelve people were walking to the town cemetery on the edge of town, they left their cars at home so the out of town visitors had room to park close by. At twelve thirty cars started to arrive, and so did a number of coach buses.

At five minutes to one there was no movement in the town at all. All those who lived in the county were at the cemetery. At the head of the grave were a pair of combat boots, an upturned rifle with bayonet stuck in the ground, and a combat helmet. Behind them stood the preacher with Jan Hollings and the three girls from the café beside him. There was a clear area of five feet to each side and foot of the grave. Beyond that were the mourners. To the preacher's right were the locals. At the foot of the grave were a large number of visitors in the ceremonial dress

of the Marine Corps League in a block formation, a solid wall of bright red coats; there were hundreds of them. A large group of civilian visitors were standing beside and behind the MCL mourners. Just to the left of Jan and the preacher were the Honor Guard from the Marine Corps League. The General wanted a funeral with an Honor Guard of serving Marines, but the League won the right to provide the Honor Guard, and then had an internal war about which detachment would provide it. In the end the Honor Guard was made up of twenty retired Marines who'd served the longest with Marine Sergeant Brooks, and here they stood, proud to do this last duty for their comrade in arms. A six foot wide lane way angles away at forty-five degrees from the left foot of the grave to the road surface one hundred feet further away to the left. The area to the left of the grave had several hundred serving Marines drawn up in rows, here on leave to say goodbye to a comrade.

While she waited, Jan looked over the twenty members in the Honor Guard. Most were men, but there were two women as well. All of them wore white shirts, black ties with the Marine emblem on them held in place by a gold tie bar, black trousers with black belts and a gold buckle with the Marine emblem, black socks, shiny black shoes, white gloves, red military style caps, and red coats. They looked very smart. The seven men with the rifles stood in a line a little apart from the main group, while the two women were the flag bearers - the American Flag and the Marine banner. Also nearby was a table with the Marine banner, a sword, and a Marine cap.

At one o'clock in the afternoon the town's lone hearse is the only thing that moved on the roads for miles around as it pulled up and stopped near the pall bearers of three serving Marines, all Master Gunnery Sergeants, and three Sheriff's Deputies, all in their best uniforms. They removed the coffin from the hearse and slowly made their way down the open lane. At the graveside they lowered the coffin to the ground and moved to their places on both sides of the grave.

Preacher Brooks said a simple service and spoke about Rudy as a youth when he was still a child. He then called on the few asked to speak about the deceased. Many had wanted to speak, but only a few had been invited to do so. A few spoke of Rudy during his career as a serving Marine, and the owner of the café spoke about his last years.

The final speaker was Ma White. She moved to the head of the grave, and said, "I've been asked to speak about Rudy as I've known him the longest. We went to school together, where he was two years ahead of me. We dated, we even got married and then divorced. But I didn't realize until the events that lead up to the divorce how much I really didn't know Rudy. Back home they called him Yonee Reb as that's how they pronounced the nickname for the rebels during the War Between the States, the Johnny Rebs. It's all to do with local accents. He got the name because he always went his own way. When, at ten years of age, his father told him he was to study to become a preacher, Rudy refused, saying he was going to make his life as a soldier. For a peaceful Amish community that was a bit of a shock. He said some of the community had to serve as soldiers, or there would be no way to ensure the continued life of the community. When he swore the oath of allegiance, he meant every word of it deep down to the core of his being. When he became a Marine, the phrase 'Once a Marine, Always a Marine' became a central part of his being. As did his marriage vows when he made them. Where I misunderstood him, is that when the oaths conflicted, the earlier ones had to be met first. So when he put the Corps ahead of his family, I left him. Yonee Reb is one of the few people who has lived his life as he saw it, always doing his duty. He has always made a difference in the lives of those around him. And this is shown by the attendance of all of us here, and those upset they can't be here with us today. Some would say he did things his way, but they're wrong. He did do things his way until he turned eighteen, since then he has done everything the Marine way. I've not earned the right to say this, but today I'll say this for Marine Rudolph Eugene Brooks, as it's what he'd say to you all for being here today; *Semper fi.*"

She gave a small smile as she looked up while what seemed like a roar of "Oorah," came from those around the grave. She moved back to her family.

Preacher Brooks stepped up and nodded to the pall bearers. The Honor Guard snapped to attention. The pall bearers picked up the ropes, two Marines removed the American Flag covering the coffin and held it over the grave. Two men removed the bars the coffin had rested on. The pall bearers started to lower the coffin into the grave. As they

did this Preacher Brooks said some soft words and several serving Marine buglers set around the area played taps in a marvelous harmony. The beautiful sounds suited the solemn ceremony. Orders were given, the riflemen responded, and they fired three volleys. Their precision actions in response to the orders as they fired matched the beauty and solemnity of the occasion. The pall bearers turned and slow marched away. They stopped at the lane way they had come up.

The two Marines holding the flag folded it in a specific way while another Marine explained what the colors meant, and why the flag was folded as it was. He also explained what the flag meant to the country and the Marines. Three empty rifle cartridges were placed inside the flag and the meaning of what each one represented was explained. The flag was then presented to Jan on behalf of the Marine Corps League.

A moment of silence, then the officer in charge of the Honor Guard started to call out names. Apart from the call of the name and the response of the named Marine, there was total silence. There were too many Marines present to name everyone of them, so only the names of those Marines who did something as part of the ceremony were called. The names of thirty Marines were called and each responded, then the thirty-first name was called out, "Marine Brooks." Silence, "Marine Brooks!" Silence, "Marine Brooks!" Each call a little louder than the previous one and the silence was deafening!! The officer saluted and turned to the Sergeant Major. He instructed that Marine Brooks be removed from the Roll Call. Many hundreds of people were present, yet they all maintained absolute silence as they recognized and acknowledged the honor that was being accorded to Marine Brooks.

Two buglers and several Marines that were standing in the front row waited a moment, then stepped forward. While the buglers played, the men sang the Marine Corps Hymn; a very beautiful rendition. As they finished a cage of doves sitting beside the Honor Guard was opened and twenty-four white doves were released. They flew forward out of the cage and circled in the open space above the grave, circling up a few times before flying off over the Honor Guard and between the two flags held by the flag bearers, the flags flapped in the light breeze that had just started to blow.

Ernest Bywater

All stood still for a moment in silence, then they started to move off, without a word being said near the grave. Before they moved off, many looked at the headstone and read the simple inscription on it:

Rudolph Eugene Brooks

“Johnny Reb”

Master Gunnery Sergeant

Always a Marine

Lived in service to his country and its people.

Died in service to his country and its people.

ALWAYS A MARINE

Also by Ernest Bywater

ZOMBIE

An Australian soldier is killed in Afghanistan. Some years later an eleven year old girl is abducted from near her school in a rural town of New South Wales, Australia. A strange man in worn Army desert camos discovers the girl, but she has a rare blood group and is bleeding to death. It is a race against time. The local community pulls together to try to save her life by donating blood. Neighbours and strangers are determined to help the girl and give her sister their support. Even a nearby Army base gets involved because she's the daughter of a well respected officer who died in Afghanistan. During the first few days of her stay in the hospital there are some mysterious incidents and some interesting revelations.

OUT OF REACH

This moving romance story deals with some of the day to day events that occur in the lives of high school students. A shy and reclusive fifteen year old genius moves house with his family when his father gets a promotion. He moves from a small country town to a city. In circumstances that are unusual for him he meets a girl who becomes the great love of his life and he wants nothing but to grow old with her as they live a normal life. But he has many secrets and one is a very dark secret that means his dream is out of reach and will always remain so. Because of his love he faces his greatest fears and defeats them in order to be with her.

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