Bring Your Boy Home

by Emilene

Summary

Dickon returns from World War I.

Notes

For v_greyson, who wrote: DICKON SURVIVES WWI. Right? RIGHT. YES. Yes he does! No psychically soul bounded wolves in this though, I'm afraid.

I did some reading in an attempt to get a better feel for World War I, and one of the books that had the most influence on me was Testament of Youth by Vera Brittain, so a debt must be acknowledged there, for it gave me a sense of what it felt on the domestic side of things, during WWI.

I know very little about injuries sustained in war. I did some research on shell shock for this story, and tried to portray it in a way that reflected what was known about it at the time (as far as I could determine what that was), but it is quite possible that I have misrepresented it in some way.

When the Military Service Act passed in January of 1916, Colin was still two years too young to be affected, but Dickon’s eighteenth birthday came in early March, and by July he had been sent to the Front. Colin and Mary both entered college that year. They wrote often, and Dickon wrote when he could, though the vagaries of the army post meant that his letters did not always reach them in a
timely manner.

“I am not even in this dreadful War the way you are,” Mary wrote in early December, “and yet I am so very tired of it. It creeps into every aspect of our lives, even here in England. Our lives have become some strange parody of normalcy – we attend classes and meals and go to the music hall, etc. and always the War looms at every step. Nearly every one of my classmates knows someone who is a family member or a close family friend who is in the War. It is very hard to forget the War, even when one wants to for just a few hours.”

“It sometimes seems as though Mary and I have been separated from you for years and years, not just a few months” Colin wrote, in that same month. “We have missed you dreadfully. If I did not see Mary on a regular basis I would begin to doubt my own memory and think that all that time we three spent together happened in some other life. Yet every time I receive a letter from you it as though you were right back here with us.”

“Our childhood does feel a lifetime ago, at the very least,” Dickon wrote back, to Colin. “When I think of the secret garden it seems so far away from my life the way it is now, that I can hardly believe it is part of my life it all. Rather, it feels like a dream, or a story I’ve been told over and over again about someone else. This War is as far as from those peaceful afternoons on the moor or the time we spent in the garden as anything can possibly be. There is nothing peaceful about war. It can be dull and boring and more terrible than you can possibly imagine, but it is never peaceful. It is quiet without the restfulness one expects quietness to bring. And at other times it is a terrible cacophony of sound and mud and things I can’t bear to tell you about.”

Dickon kept Mary and Colin’s letters tied together with a bit of ribbon Mary had given him before he shipped out. In the pocket of his uniform he kept a picture of each of them.

The War dragged on.

In late October of 1917 Mrs. Sowerby received a telegram that Dickon had been wounded in action, and they all lived in terror of what had happened until they heard that he was not mortally injured.

Mary was visiting Martha some two weeks later, when a younger sister of Martha and Dickon’s burst into the house.

“Dickon’s coming back!” Elaine gasped out.

Martha gave a little cry.

“When is he coming?” Mary cried eagerly.

“Next Tuesday,” Elaine replied.

Martha swept her several squalling and toddling infants, Elaine, and Mary into a hug.

“This calls for a celebration, to be sure,” she exclaimed.

Dickon’s arrival, the following week showed the truth that the War had changed him. The greatest challenge came not with his physical injuries, which were in the end not as bad as many of his contemporaries (he was still recovering from cuts and bruises from having had a shell explode near him, and was permanently deaf in his left ear), but the psychological ones. The doctors had said he might still be suffering from something they called “shell shock” – a type of psychological trauma incurred in the War. After three nights in his own home, where he woke up every night yelling from nightmares, it was decided that he (and his terrified younger siblings) might be better off if he spent some time at Misselthwaite Manor, until his nightmares subsided somewhat.
“I am doubtful of rest and quiet as a long-term cure,” Colin confided privately to Mary one day. “I do not disagree that it is probably the best option at the moment, but I fear that they may try to keep him prisoner from the world. I would not like to see that happen to him.”

“We won’t let them,” Mary assured him. “You know we won’t.”

Dickon, Colin, and Mary spent many hours in the secret garden. Though the original robin of their acquaintance had passed on, several of the original his progeny kept them company.

“These must be the children thou wert writin’ about,” Dickon said, watching the robins hopping closer.

“Yes,” Colin said. “We’ve named them. That one is Freddy and the one on the right is Cyril”.

“Pleased to meet thee,” Dickon bowed his head slightly to the pair.

“They know all about you already,” Mary told him. “Colin and I tell them stories of all the adventures we’ve had with you.”

One of the robins hopped over to Dickon.

“This is Cyril?” Dickon asked softly.

“Yes.”

“Pleased to meet thee, Cyril. How art thou?” Dickon inquired, laying his palm face up.

The robin eyed him with one bright beady black eye, and chirped.

Dickon remained very still, and Cyril hopped onto his hand. Very slowly, he took his other hand and gently ran a finger down the robin’s back.

“Cyril must really like you,” Colin laughed softly. “He’s very friendly to us but he’s never let Mary or I touch him.”

“Tha’ just needs to know how to talk to them,” Dickon replied.

The robin hopped off and flew off to a nearby branch.

“It’s so good to have you back,” Mary said.

“We’ve missed you, terribly,” Colin added.

“Thou art a sight for sore eyes,” Dickon agreed, his eyes filling.

They scooted close together and wrapped their arms around one another.

Just then, they heard the joyful noise of children laughing and running up the path. A moment later, Dickon’s younger brothers and sisters dashed through into the garden.

“Dickon!” His siblings cried, and launched themselves at the three young people, who welcomed them with open arms

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