

A Call to Action

By Zachary Crabtree

"You don't know what it's like!" the young man responded to the swarthy gentleman at the dinner table. The young man put down his fork. "You don't know what it's like to live in a world where yellow food packages fall alongside bombs!" "Well you don't know either," the gentleman answered.

"Let's not fight at the dinner table," interrupted the gentleman's wife.

"But what I'd really like to know," the young man continued, "is what's inside those packages that will repair the damage of the bombs."

"I hear they send medicine," the young man's mother answered. "But let's not talk about these type of things at the dinner table." The three of them looked back to their plates of mashed potatoes and green beans. The roast was still in the oven.

"Anyway," the gentleman put in anxiously, "they're not falling alongside bombs. We drop the bombs on our enemies, the packages go to our friends."

"I hear the packages are dropping in the desert," the young man interrupted.

"Well that's where those people live!" the gentleman shot back.

"Let's talk about something else" his wife said in a raised voice. Both the gentleman and the young man understood the significance of this change in tone. The gentleman went back to stuffing mashed potatoes down his throat while the young man impatiently began shifting his silverware around the clean wooden table.

"It's too cold," the young man remarked.

"Just put it in the microwave," his mom responded. She thought he was complaining about the mashed potatoes.

"No, it's not the potatoes; it's this house," the young man emphasized.

"Then turn up the heat," the gentleman answered.

"There are some who don't have that luxury," the young man continued.

"Stop your suffering!" shouted the gentleman. The table shook as he banged his fist against the polished wood. "If I hear one more goddamn complaint," he shook his fist, "then

you're packing your bags and going to Afghanistan!" His wife gave him a look which begged him to calm himself. "And besides," he added with a clever grin, "those people don't need heat. That region 's already hot enough as it is!" The gentleman chuckled and relaxed his fisted hand; he leaned his elbow against the table.

"It snows during the winter," the young man commented underneath his breath.

The gentleman nodded vaguely as if understanding the content of the remark, but at the same time, not quite catching its intended meaning.

"I certainly hope it snows this winter," his wife put in. She had been gaming for a change in conversation. It was enough that there was a war going on overseas; she didn't need one at her table.

"The desert gets cold at night," the young man continued.

"Enough of this!" the woman shouted. "The war is over! And if I hear one more word about it. . . ." The table resumed a quieted air. The gentleman dug into his mashed potatoes with his fork. The young man studied his green beans. A buzzing sound signaled that the roast was ready to be removed from the oven. The woman got up from her seat and went into the kitchen. The gentleman and the young man stared uneasily at their plates of food as they sat across from each other.

"I'm going outside for a cigarette," the young man remarked as he got up from the table.

"Aren't you going to finish your food?" his mother called from the kitchen.

"I'm not hungry," the young man insisted. He grabbed his coat from the back of his chair and left the room. The door in the entryway could be heard closing behind him. The gentleman rolled some green beans against his potatoes as the woman re-entered the room with a roast cradled in an orange clay platter. The dinner commenced in silence. The young man's food would have to be cleared from the table when the meal was over.

Outside, it was cold. The young man shivered in his blue jeans and mouse-colored jacket. He had a pair of wool stitched gloves. His hands were in the pockets of his coat. He could see his stepfather and mother through the window of the dining room. They were eating their meal with relative indifference. The lawn was covered with various ornaments and it was lush and green from having been watered and cared for with the utmost efficiency.

He pulled out a cigarette from his coat pocket and fumbled with it in his hands. It was difficult to maneuver his hands while they were covered in such warm thick wool. He pulled off one of his gloves, immediately feeling the cold air bite against his exposed fingers. With his free hand, he placed the filter between his lips and reached into his pants pocket. He took out a lighter to spark his cigarette.

He smoked his cigarette. Somehow, whenever it was cold outside, he always expected that first drag to warm his frozen body. It never did. The days would get colder. The weather forecast predicted that the first snowfall would appear within a couple of days. He watched the cherry tip of his cigarette light, then fade. He placed his exposed hand into the pocket of his jeans as the cigarette dangled from his mouth. The watered grass had turned into slush; it soaked through the leather soles of his shoes and moistened his socks.

The sky was grey and overcast. It looked as if a wet roll of paper towels had been placed overtop its clouded extent. The young man put out his cigarette against the gravel walk. It was only a third of the way smoked, but he needed to go inside. It was too cold. He threw the cigarette into the grass and put on his remaining glove.

Beyond this gloomy piece of sky hanging over the lawn, there were distant lands, places where people walked on the ceilings no doubt, and other such things which he could only imagine. His warm breath chilled into a mist before his pale face. The bitter wind snapped at the red boundary of his ears; the tip of his nose was frozen numb, a core to an ever growing expanse of coldness over a shrinking world.

There was something outside of this suburban neighborhood. He could see the grey-blue sky lumped through the silhouetted branches of an oak tree. The hour was getting late. The moon peered from behind a clouded veil underneath which a row of red brick houses lined the horizon. The young man shivered back into his home. He was hungry, cold, tired, and if he hurried, he could probably catch his dinner before it was cleared from the table.

He passed across the entryway to hang up his coat in the closet. The room was of a moderate size; two large windows on either side of the front door looked out onto the lawn. Inside, it was unusually frigid. His stepfather and mother were in the dining room busying themselves with their meal. He stopped on the threshold to the dining room, then turned to check the temperature on the thermostat next to the closet wall: it was set to 70 degrees. Outside, it was nearly 20 degrees. He turned the knob up 5 degrees, then crossed the threshold into the dining room. That war can be conducted with the sacrifice of every civilian is a myth! Don't believe it. Every sacrifice perpetuates the conduct; all other ways of conducting oneself become changed. But what happens when one doesn't even notice if he has sacrificed anything, for he already has so much --what happens then!?