

# The Little Tough Sergeant

Short Story by Ella Freer in  
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**U**ACK, oh, Jack, please, please, do take me with you!" Pretty little Mabel Brownlee had her arms about the neck of handsome, stalwart, brown-tanned Captain Bertrand, who seemed to be much annoyed.

"I can't take you, Mabel, much as I wish you to go. It isn't to be a picnic. You probably won't see a piece of cake, a lady-finger, a plate of ice cream or even a good sandwich in the Philippines—if you go there—and a fellow can't be on the firing line with his wife with him. The Twentieth is hooked for the firing line, good and hard, and you can't be there. Now don't be a little silly! Be a woman and wait for me, like a true sweetheart as you are."

The men of the Twentieth Kansas were storming the cars at Topeka which were to take them to San Francisco. There, after drill and "setting up," they were to set sail for the far-away Philippines. Good-byes had been said, and in a few moments the train would be speeding westward toward the Golden Gate.

Captain Bertrand, eager to see active service, was quivering with excitement, and pretty Mabel, some day to be his wife, was quite secondary in his thoughts. Again he said: "Don't be a sweet little silly, Mabel! Of course, you can't go with the regiment! Women are not allowed, you know. It wouldn't be the proper thing—you, among such a crowd of rough men. Now wait for me, my darling, and we'll be married the very minute the war's over. That won't be long. We'll knock the Spaniards endwise."

As he spoke his eyes wandered restlessly over the surging mass of enthusiastic men, his bright eyes shining and his face aflame.

"What if you should get killed, Jack?" asked Mabel, her lips quivering with pain. "I won't be near you, dear, and you'll die all alone!"

"I won't die, Mabel, as long as I have your prayers, my sweet pet; but then, many a better fellow than I ever hope to be has gone down." Then, seeing the lines of anguish in her face, he added lightly: "But, dear, I can't be killed. I have a mascot!"

The men were in the coaches, the train was ready to start, and still Mabel held her soldier-lover in her arms.

"You are setting a bad example for your men, Captain Bertrand!" said a stern voice behind them, and as they turned the old major of Jack's battalion, his face dark and severe, confronted them. "I hope you will not lag in action in this way, sir!"

Jack's face crimsoned as he saluted his superior, and hastily pressing the fair, weeping girl to his heart, he kissed her lips half a dozen times, gathered his sword under his arm and ran to the train. Springing upon the lower step of the platform, he was fairly dragged aboard by willing, lusty hands. Leaning far out from the platform, he waved his hat to Mabel, who stood fluttering her handkerchief, and soon the cheering regiment was out of sight.

Mabel and Jack had been sweethearts since early childhood, but her parents would not listen to a marriage. When Jack volunteered for the Spanish-American war Mabel's father, a stiff-necked, positive old man, said: "It's the only sensible thing Jack ever done in his whole darned life."

"Ah doan' b'lieve Jack's a cowahd," said the old man; "but jes' wuthless. Ah fit for foah year into th' Rebellion, an' Ah know a fightin' man when Ah see him. Ah hope Jack'll find some fightin'!"

"I just believe you want to get Jack killed," sobbed Mabel.

"Ah want ter see w'at stuff's in 'im," insisted the old man, stoutly. "Ef he's w'at Ah t'nk he is, he can have yer. He's poplar, case they made 'im captain of h's comp'ny, an' Ah'm glad no cowahd nevah come co'tin' mah daughtah. Ah fit foah year fo' th' south, but ef Ah was a young man Ah'd fight fer th' flag now."

After Jack had gone with his company to Topeka, the state rendezvous, Mr. Brownlee went around among his friends praising Jack for his manliness, and said he was "jes' th' man Ah want fer a son-in-law; Jack'll fight!"

Jack was not, generally speaking, a young man of promise, although popular; the girls liked him, he was the leader in all manly sports (and mischief, too) but he seemed destined to succeed in nothing. When the government granted Kansas' appeal to raise troops for the Spanish-American war, Jack was among the first to volunteer, raised a company, and was elected captain. He loved a soldier's life.

The night previous to his departure for Topeka he called upon Mabel. His uniform set off his manly proportions, and Mabel was so stirred she could do nothing but kiss and hug him.

"Yosh uniform fits yeh all right," was old man Brownlee's only remark, "but hit depen's whuthah th' front or th' otuh side is shown to th' enemy! Don't forgit that, young man! Don' yeah come prowlin' 'roun' heah any mob if a bullet doan' hit yoh squah f'm in front."

Mr. Brownlee permitted Mabel to go to Topeka (accompanied by her mother) to see Jack away, and the old lady cried, too, when the train left.

"Shoot straight, Jack!" she shouted at him, "an' don't ketch cold!"

"I'll just give Jack a surprise," said Mabel to herself, as she lay in her bed that night at the hotel. He'll take me to the Philippines just the same!" and her mind being made up, she went smilingly to sleep. When little Mabel once made up her mind she was as "set" as her old father, and the latter knew it. He was glad when Jack volunteered for service in the army, for he was perfectly aware that, sooner or later, Mabel and Jack would marry, and the old gentleman wanted a son-in-law who was "wuth sump'n."

Great was Captain Bertrand's surprise when Mabel put in an appearance one day at the camp near the Presidio, at San Francisco. She was prettier than ever; she was so pretty, in fact, that officers and men of the Twentieth made the most ludicrous mistakes in tactics and other things because they couldn't keep their eyes off of her instead of attending to their military duties. Even old Major Bowers issued an incorrect order one day, much to the surprise of the regiment and the chagrin of the veteran.

"I've come to be married, Jack, and I'm going to the Philippines!" was the astounding announcement, delivered calmly.

That was all there was to it, and there being no way out of it, Jack told the major, and the major told the colonel. The major did not neglect to inform the colonel also (whose mind was busy with other things) that Captain Bertrand was the luckiest dog he ever knew. "It ought to be a regimental wedding, colonel," said the major.

"Why?" asked the colonel shortly. "This regiment isn't a matrimonial bureau."

"No other regiment here, colonel, has ever had one," suggested the major, "and we'll beat 'em all out."

If there was anything the colonel loved it was to beat the other fellow, whoever he might be, and so he agreed to the plan. The colonel wasn't a man of many words. "But how the devil is she to get to the Philippines?" asked the colonel suddenly. "Oh, she'll get there somehow," answered the major wisely. "That girl'd marry the czar if she made her mind up to do it."

Then he told the colonel the whole story; how he had reprimanded Jack at Topeka, and how the girl had "showed up at San Francisco," and the colonel laughed until his sides were sore.

"Go ahead!" said the colonel, plunging into the mass of business before him, and the major, who made himself master of ceremonies, went ahead. It was the most elaborate function of the season in San Francisco, and more than a mere regimental affair; for the general officers and their staffs, and the colonel and all his officers, and the regiment and high the high-up society people of the city were there; and Mabel received presents—valuable ones, too—from all sides.

The regiment gave her cheers three times three, and all through the ceremonies (the wedding and the reception) Mabel was as cool as a rose on a dewy morning, while Jack swore the heat was something tremendous. "It must be eight thousand in the shade!" said he.

Mabel, although now a married woman, had thirteen hundred ardent admirers, bound tightly to her by knots of admiration, among whom was the first sergeant of Jack's company—the Little Tough Sergeant, they called him. O, but he was tough! There wasn't the slightest doubt of it! He was wicked, too; in fact, he was so bad the regiment couldn't even take pride in him.

This Little Tough Sergeant inspired terror among the men, and commanded respect on the part of the officers. He never did anything because it was right, nor refrained from doing anything because it might be wrong; he exhibited little or no moral sense, but he was a dead shot, quick on the trigger and absolutely devoid of fear.

While the Twentieth was being drilled, put in order and recruited at Topeka, he slouched into the recruiting office one afternoon and said he wanted to enlist. The recruiting officer, a veteran of the regular army, asked him if he could handle firearms, and he said he could. Could he ride? Yes. Had he ever scouted? Yes. Had he ever been in the ranks? Yes. The recruiting officer jumped at the chance, and put the newcomer on the roster. He had fought Indians for twenty years, and could distinguish a man of fighting breed at a glance.

What name the recruit assigned himself doesn't matter. This is a story containing some facts, and the name given by the recruit was doubtless no fact.

He was made first sergeant of Jack's company, and when the men under him looked into his eyes they concluded to obey any and every order he chose to give—and obey it in a hurry. When on duty they called him "Sergeant," and said "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," when he put inquiries to them; when off duty they said nothing to him, whatever, for he was not in the least companionable; never joked, never laughed, nor had words with any one.

Although he was a blonde and as freckled as the firmament on a clear, sum-

mer night, the men did not call him "Sandy," even to themselves; very thin he was, and yet he was never dubbed "Fatty;" low in stature, he was never referred to as "Lengthy." It was feared he might resent those familiar and endearing diminutives common among soldier comrades, and as no man in the regiment could "draw" with him, the Little Tough Sergeant was allowed to wend his way in peace and quiet.

Colonel Funston was tickled to death when he heard of him. "He'll be a treasure when we get to fighting in the Philippines!" was the only comment of the little red-headed commander.

The angry glance of the Little Tough Sergeant was a death warrant.

Mabel was passing a squad one day, the Little Tough Sergeant being in command. He was a thorough disciplinarian, and the "awkward squad" under him was soon reduced to obedient, well-drilled men. Mabel smiled upon the men, and the order was at once given "present arms!"

"Thank you," said Mabel, as she passed along the line. "May I give you a rose, sergeant?"

The Little Tough Sergeant, standing erect and motionless, made no sign, and then Mabel, with her own pretty fingers, pinned the rose upon his breast. When she had passed from sight the drill was resumed. It was whispered about the company tents that night that the Little Tough Sergeant was seen to carefully unpin the rose, press it to his lips, and then hide it under his coat.

"He's the best man in the company," said Jack, "and I'll bet he's the best in the entire regiment!"

After that Mabel never failed to smile upon the Little Tough Sergeant when she met him, and he always stood at "attention" as she passed.

At last the welcome order to sail for Manila came, and the men of the regiment were in a perfect frenzy of delight. There was one sad and heavy little heart, however. Mabel knew there was an order which prohibited women from sailing on the transport. Sorrowful, also, were the men of Captain Bertrand's company. So sweet and dainty a woman as the wife of the captain would be like a bit of sunshine on board during the long and weary voyage.

The day before the regiment sailed Mabel met the Little Tough Sergeant, and was seen to stop and speak to him. He said nothing, but she was much in earnest through it all. He stood at "attention" all the time—and when they parted he had not said a word.

The day the regiment sailed was a memorable one for San Francisco. Down Market street from the Presidio to the wharf the troops marched proudly, Jack at the head of his company.

"That fellow'll be a fine mark for some sharp shooter," remarked a gray-headed spectator in a pitying tone, and many another looker-on thought so, too.

To Jack's surprise (and relief, also) Mabel did not take the parting so hard as he feared. She was tearful, as might have been expected, but not downcast.

"You're a brave little one, after all!" he declared, "and I want you to pray for me. Your prayers will do for both of us. I'll be too busy for much else than fighting."

"I'll see you again, some of these days, Jack," she said, as she kissed him good-bye. "But I'll be brave, as becomes a soldier's wife, until we meet again, my darling."

Jack hugged and kissed her heartily and sprang aboard. He turned to wave his hat to her, but she was nowhere to be seen. "Poor sweetheart!" he thought, "I'll bet she's crying her little eyes out. She bore up before me, but when my back was turned she flew to some quiet place to have a good cry. I just know she did."

Probably the transport had traversed 200 miles when strange and startling rumors regarding a stowaway (a woman at that) began to circulate throughout the ship. She was pretty, too, it was said, in spite of her badly-fitting uniform.

"I'll put up a month's pay I know who is it," chuckled the major in reply to an inquiry from the colonel.

"Well, out with it! Who is she?" demanded the colonel, half laughing, half indignant.

"If it's anybody, colonel, it's that little wife of Captain Bertrand!"

"It won't be so funny when I get through with him!" remarked the colonel unpleasantly.

Captain Bertrand was ordered to appear before the colonel, and he straightway obeyed. On his way to the colonel's cabin a great light broke in upon him. "Mabel said she'd see me before long," he mused, "and I was a big fool not to know what she meant. I'm no match for her! She's the stowaway, as sure as I'm on this boat."

"We have a woman on board," remarked the colonel.

"So I have heard, colonel," he answered respectfully.

"Any idea who she may be?" asked the colonel, with a barely perceptible twinkle in his eye.

"I'll risk my life that it's my wife!" Jack bursts out.

"And of course you didn't have any notion she was on board, eh?"

"On my honor, colonel, I did not!" "Well," the colonel went on to say, "knowing what a fearless little thing she is, I believe, with you, she's the stowaway. Let us find out."

The little stowaway, accompanied by the Little Tough Sergeant, was brought to the colonel's cabin, and lo! it was Mabel. Blushing, crying and happy, she ran into Jack's arms, and stood looking defiantly at the colonel and the major. The rumor that her clothes didn't fit her was very much of a fact, while her beautiful hair, having broken loose from its moorings, flowed in long ripples down her back.

"Orders regarding women on board army transports are rigid!" said the colonel, endeavoring to be very stern. He then began turning over several sheets of paper relating to supplies, munitions of war and other things regarding stowaways on army transports. "She can't remain here."

"I want to die with you, Jack," she whispered; "let's ask the colonel to throw us overboard together!"

"What's that?" demanded the colonel. "No whispering here."

"We want to be thrown overboard together, if you please, colonel!" faltered Mabel.

"There is nothing in the order justifying me in throwing your husband overboard, madam," rejoined the colonel, "but I don't see anything else to do with you."

"I am compelled to obey the orders of the colonel, Mabel," said Jack, "and he has ordered me to go with him to Manila. I'm needed, you know. The regiment can't afford to lose a captain!"

There was a burst of laughter from the colonel and the major, and Mabel knew the matter was settled—that overboard she was not to go.

"If I had a wife like that," growled the major, "I'd—"

"That isn't the question," interposed the colonel, "what are we to do with Mrs. Bertrand?"

"If you please, sir," the major said, "the regulations permit women as nurses upon transports, and—"

"I think the matter may be compromised in some way," the colonel asserted reflectively, and so Mabel went through to Manila with the regiment. The men were disloyal to their country in being loyal only to Mabel; the rules and regulations went adrift; the sailors were looking at her when they should have been attending to their duties; and it was a wonder the transport didn't run into a continent or something before it reached its destination.

Mabel went ashore in great state, several warships in the harbor firing big guns at her, but there were no courts martial over the matter.

"Now tell me, honestly, Mabel," said Jack the night of the discovery, "who put you on board this transport?"

"He won't get into trouble, will he?" queried Mabel.

"He's apt to."

"Why, I wouldn't get the Little Tough Sergeant into—"

"Oh, he's the one, is he?"

"I didn't say it was, if you please, sir! You won't speak to him about it, will you, Jack?" Mabel pleaded.

"No-o," answered Jack reflectively. "I won't. The regiment might lose a captain after all."

When the regiment entered upon duty in Luzon the prophecy of the colonel that the Little Tough Sergeant would prove a "treasure" was fulfilled. Nothing seemed to tire him; he was, apparently, on duty all day and night; he hungered and thirsted for no place but the very front of the firing line; whatever he could see he could hit, and he could spot a Filipino as far as his rifle carried. Whenever his Krag Jorgensen spoke it meant business.

There was not a man in the brigade who could get a wagon and team out of the mud like the Little Tough Sergeant. He even put life into the torpid Luzon oxen. Each one is slower than two snails, strong as Atlas and much declined to any sort of exertion. Whenever a wagon became firmly rooted in the mud they sent for the Little Tough Sergeant, whose influence over animals was unusually strong—wonderful, in fact. As soon as he opened up, each individual ox seemed imbued with electric life, and it is said the records of the Twentieth Kansas show that one unusually hot day a double team of oxen not only pulled a wagon loaded with ammunition out of the deepest rut in the miriest part of all Luzon, but pulled the rut out also, clear up on the dry land.

The Little Tough Sergeant was the mules' delight. These usually obstinate creatures would break their backs for him. They love a man who knows what he is talking about, although they have small ear for ordinary oratory. And they never failed to appreciate what the Little Tough Sergeant had to say.

Busy enough were the men of the Twentieth in Luzon. When it was possible Jack too a run to Manila, where Mabel was, but this was not often. One day the Little Tough Sergeant being with him, he told Mabel he was to take a small scouting