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Nineteen Thirty-Six

by MaryPat Campbell

I would go to the ends of the earth for a leader like him. We need him, while he longs to close the gap between him and us, who follow close behind. The rain falls on his great coat, making rivulets down his back and sleeves. His boots shine like black bullets.

His shoulders are festooned with gold braid, his medals hang heavy across his chest, his buttons glitter in the morning air. In contrast, my own uniform is brown, clean, neat and well cared for, it shows my rank and achievements, ordinary and unremarkable though they may be.

As the sky darkens the rain falls in sheets. We are all drenched and wet through, but make no fuss about it because we have such a finely tuned regard for this king among men, and would follow him under the darkest clouds and through the stormiest weather, just to see his beloved form.

I want to ask him, "How does it feel to be followed, not only by your proud army, but by thousands of tanks and soldiers and millions of ordinary people?" A question I would of course never dare to ask, even if I were lucky enough to stand near him so that we could speak to and hear each other. I imagine he might look at me with his narrowed eyes & accuse me of believing that if I were to lead, then people might follow me. This thought I dare to entertain only in the privacy of my most secret and shameful fantasies.

Wise trooper that I am, I hide my hatred of him by saluting him in my most honourable and obedient manner. He must never know how greatly I admire him, and how deeply I envy him. The lengths I would go to, the deprivations I would suffer, just to have a glimpse of him up and far out in front of me, acknowledging and returning the salutes of the cheering crowds and soaking up the admiration he requires of us.

All he asks is that we march in perfect symmetry behind him through the driving rain. We march past the Chancellery, along the west side of the Tiergarten, then turn into the east-west axis leading to the Brandenburg Gate. I am filled with a sense of purpose, thousands of us following each other and our leader along these hallowed routes through my beloved city. Surely they were designed for us soldiers in uniform together with the crowds cheering and waving flags, singing songs, praising the saviour we have elected to lead us.

A small crumb of recognition is all I want, anything would do really. I will never amount to much, he and I both know that. If only I could persuade him that all I want is to please him, to serve him, to march in rank behind him. Then my life would have meaning and I would happily stamp on my own small ambitions and vow to serve and follow him forever.