

1965

I'M IN LOVE WITH A VIRGIN

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The year was December, 1965. I was a Private First Class (PFC) in the Army's Third Armored Division, stationed in *Gelnhausen*, Germany, northeast of *Frankfurt au Main*.

"Red" was a PFC too. A country boy, from the Ozark Mountains (as I recall), I don't believe he had ever been over 25 miles from his home in his whole life before he joined the Army.

He was overly-awed by the Army and fell victim to more pranks than most new soldiers.

His second day in our unit was spent looking everywhere and asking everyone if they had seen the "key to the hydrostatic lock." (The "hydrostatic lock" related to the equilibrium of fluids at rest or to the pressures they exert or transmit in our armored personnel carrier's engine. It was not a "thing"; it was a state-of-being.)

The first time he was on the rifle range, he spent over two hours — going from one sergeant to another — asking for 100 yards of "firing line". (The "firing line" was the line where troops stood to fire. It was a thing; but, you couldn't sign for it in the Supply Room.)

He seemed overwhelmed by the size of any city. *Gelnhausen*, a town I thought must have about 1,000 residents, he always called "the city."

Red was one of those guys who just can't seem to catch a break. Whatever he tried always ended in disaster. However, he was likeable and we got along well.

In those days, before "direct deposits" into banks, we got paid in cash. As a PFC, I was making \$110-a-month (the most money I had ever made up to that time in my life). I always found December to be too cold, so I was not in any hurry to go to town.

Under the financial plan I had devised, I could save \$100-a-month and get by on \$10 *if* I was frugal. I was getting "3 hots & a cot" (3 meals and a

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bed to sleep in). Our uniforms were cleaned for free, through the Quartermaster Laundry, because of our low rank. So my personal needs were minimal.

Anyway, to make a long story longer, Red went into *Frankfurt au Main* after about 3 months in Germany. He disappeared right after payday activities that Friday, and didn't show up until the wee hours of Monday morning — just in time for our 6 a.m. reveille formation.

He was flat broke but had a grin that stretched ear-to-ear. He was telling everyone who would listen — and some that didn't want to — that “I'm in love with a virgin.”

He had met the German girl of his dreams and she was a virgin. He had spent the weekend with her and they had painted the snow-covered town “red”.

I asked him how he knew she was a virgin. He replied, “She has a photo-ID with a big ‘V’ stamped on it. She told me that certifies that she was a virgin — before she met me.”

He strutted around the room like the “cock-of-the-walk”. He was so very proud.

While the others burst out laughing and snickered behind his back, I felt compelled to tell him the facts. The “V” meant she was a prostitute and had passed her latest physical to ensure she did not have a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

When the others confirmed what I told him, he became almost morose. All week long, he got more and more depressed. No efforts by me or anyone else seemed able to dissuade him from sinking further into depression.

He returned to Frankfurt that weekend. His new-found love couldn't even remember him. She was too busy “escorting” two large, weight-lifters from the Division Headquarters.

Red returned to the barracks broken hearted.

The next morning, I thought I had made progress in consoling him. I approached him as he watched the dawn arise over the hill across from our 6th floor barracks room. I pointed out that sharing that room with 46 other guys wasn't that bad a deal when you viewed such beautiful sunrises on the few mornings it wasn't overcast in December.

I pointed out the beauty of the hill, the clarity of the snow, the friends that surrounded him. I opened the large window and asked him to breath in the chilled air of promise.

He nodded and smiled a little.

I heard the reveille bell and, with the others, scurried down to formation. We stood formation on the asphalt driveway in front of our barracks.

I looked around but could not see Red.

Moments later, from the 6th floor, Red screamed that he had no reason to live without the love-of-his-life. He was standing on the ledge on the 6th floor. While we screamed, "Don't...", he leaped to what was to be his death.

Unfortunately for his plans, he hit the 3-foot tall snow bank at the base of the building. The medics who ran to his rescue found that he had survived without a scratch although he had to change his underwear.

When questioned by the Provost Marshal, he confessed to trying to commit suicide, so he was placed under arrest. Under the terms of *The Uniform Code of Military Justice*, committing suicide gets you a military funeral. Attempting, but failing, to commit suicide is a court martial offense.

They took him away to a psychiatric hospital somewhere in Germany where he stayed for about 3 months.

He returned but was reassigned to the 1st Platoon which lived on the 3rd floor. The Army had decided that he needed to return to his old unit for stability, but not to his old platoon which it feared might harass him.

The first Friday night, after payday, he was back in Frankfurt. He found another love-of-his-life. They spent the weekend together. He was flat-broke by Monday morning but his grin — and its accompanying euphoria — lasted all week.

The next weekend he returned to Frankfurt. Alas, Red had spent all of his money the weekend before. His new love had found another new love who had money. He "bummed around" town all weekend; sleeping in the Division Headquarters barracks because he had no money.

Monday was one of those beautiful Spring days. In Germany, the air is crisp, there seems to be a bird singing in every tree, and the skies are as clear as a baby's complexion. Since I was up since 4:30 A.M., I had made a

morning hike up the hill, across from the barracks, returning just in time to be in formation for the roll call.

I looked down toward the 1st platoon. Red was there but he seemed truly depressed. All day long, he moped around.

At the 5 P.M. evening formation, Red was missing. The First Sergeant called us to attention.

About then, I heard Red's voice booming out into the still air. "My life is a lie; it has no meaning. Today, I take my life for love."

There he was on the 3rd floor window's edge. He had planned ahead this time. There would be no snow drift to prevent his death.

He had borrowed some towing rope from the Supply Room. He wrapped one end around the heating unit and tied the other around his neck in the classic "hangman's noose."

There he stood, tears streaming down his cheeks, face flush, eyes glazed over.

We screamed, as one, "Don't."

Too late, he leaped to what was to be his death.

Fortunately, he broke only his leg, sprained his wrists and was black and blue in a lot of places.

Since he had not measured the rope accurately, there was four more feet than he needed to hang himself. He laid there whining like a whipped puppy.

The medics tried to calm him down and, finally, gave him a shot of something that made his eyes roll to the back of his head and caused him to pass out.

When he was revived, he was questioned by the Provost Marshall.

Since he confessed to trying to commit suicide, he was placed under arrest. In the military, as in the civilian world, if you are successful at suicide, we weep at your funeral; but, if you're not successful, it's a crime.

Poor Red was transferred to a psychiatric hospital in northern Germany and I never saw him again.

I have always felt sorry for Red. The clouds of doom followed him around like they were attached to him by an unshakable umbilical cord.

Maybe, in that rubber room, he was able to untangle the cord.

What I learned from that experience was:

- ❶ Since that time, I've met several women whom I cherished. I never once asked to see their "Virgin" card.
- ❷ The loss of love didn't cause his depression. Unrealistic expectations always exceeded his limitations.
- ❸ No plan should be executed before every aspect is tested.
- ❹ Suicide — attempted or successful — stops you from seeing the next sunrise's promise of a better day.