

The Waiter at the Camp

The officers' friend is the waiter at camp.
In the night air 'twas cold and was bitterly damp,
And they asked me to dine, which I readily did,
For at dining I've talents I never keep hid.
Then a bright-eyed young fellow came in with the meat,
And straightway the troop of us started to eat.

I silently noticed that young fellow wait
At each officer's side 'til he'd filled up his plate;
I was startled a bit at the very first look
By the size of the helping each officer took,
And I thought as I sat there among them that night
Of the army's effect on a man's appetite.

The waiter at last brought the platter to me
And modestly proper I started to be.
A small piece of meat then I gracefully took;
The young fellow stood there and gave me a look.
'Better get all you want,' he remarked to me then,
'I pass this way once, but I don't come again.'

I turned in amazement. He nodded his head
In a way that convinced me he meant what he said.
I knew from his manner and smile on his lip
That the rule in the army is 'no second trip.'
And I thought as he left me my food to attack,
Life gives us one chance, but it never comes back.

Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)