

DIVIDED BY WAR
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1st September 1939 – the declaration of war

I remember being introduced to the prime hour of September 1939; listening to the sounds of eerie silence as my eyes stared blankly at the wireless. My breath being feasted on as my body was being compressed by the flesh and bones of other anxious souls; I'd squirm at the movements of others – my mind being possessed by the claustrophobic feeling – like I was being enclosed in a box of skin. I'd witness families from other households surrounding my kitchen table; their eyes locked on to the small transmitter in the middle of my wooden, worn out table. The broadcaster continued to speak anxious words whilst relatives huddled stronger together being aware of the muffled noises from Neville Chamberlain.

"... I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received and that, consequently, this country is at war with Germany." My heart dropped vigorously due to the sudden halt to the uncontrollable beats of my heart that pumped its way through my chest. My eyes ushered up; scanning the petite room that bordered around us – the men's faces rose with excitement yet the woman's dropped with trepidation. I gazed down at my little sister; trembling fearfully in her summer dress – her wisdom filling rapidly with clueless thoughts. I instantly knew that she didn't understand what was going on.

Finally, my conscience was in defeat. I ignored the debate in my head. I knew for certain that the outcomes weren't great but I had to stay strong. I turned around and looked briefly at my mother; sobbing in her white silk cloth that absorbed her tears of sorrow; I felt her sensitivity that quickly passed on to my already terrified intellect – a wall of water constructed on my eyes; blocking my sense of sight. I felt the wall then break apart and fall down my pale cheek like a stream of warm horror. Why did I turn around?

3rd September 1939, 22:17 pm – two days after Britain's declaration of the Second World War –

"Have the War Office gone completely out of their mind?!" I heard Mother bawl at Father, "they just can't wait to take you away from me!" This wasn't an unusual event, in fact it was quite expected. "Why are you shouting at me? It's not my fault that they called me in early!" Linda and I commonly hear the general argument in the late hours of the evening: the man coming in drunk every other night; never spending his personal time with us and just complaining about how miserable his job is, however the peculiar yet grateful part is that they still have affection for each other. I constantly kept watching over my fragile sister- I knew that she didn't understand many of life's issues and she wasn't that open with her problems although it's pretty warming that she looks up to me as a role model – it makes me feel like I have a special position in life and not just a cry for help.

I additionally became wondrous on the subject (considering that it was unknown to both Linda and I on what Mama and Papa loudly discussed) but I didn't make it my highest priority to listen because it was properly something to do with either Ma or Pa's ways of living, therefore I picked myself up from the Ohio cupboard blue carpet and tiptoed back to my bedroom with my sister; firmly gripping on to my hand worried that we would make a creaking sound from the old floor boards that lay under the carpet. Thankfully we didn't make a single peep.

5th November 1939 8:06 a.m. – The worst day of my life

I opened my eyes slightly and hissed at the burning sunlight that beamed through my dark marine blue curtains – Mama said that we had to have them on our windows to avoid enemy bombers that flew in the sky at night. I swung my legs over until they reached the edge of my bed and my feet just managed to reach the floor; I saw Linda still tucked up within her pastel yellow bed sheets – dreaming far and beyond her wild imagination. The good elements about the morning was that I get to wake up and see Mama and Papa sitting peacefully around the kitchen table; sipping their teas gently just waiting to see the presents of their two beautiful creations. I strolled down the stairs with the usual smile on my face and turned to the kitchen. I stopped in between the door frames of the kitchenette and just stood there minus the smile. “Ma, where is Papa?” I mumbled as I observed Ma wailing in her rich ivory hands; dripping with her tears. She raised her head – her face covered with her hand prints and the Devil’s Rings of Fire burnt around her eyes. I dare questioned her but she then pulled out a chair that signalled me to sit down beside her. “Judy, darling, we need to talk about something”, Ma sobbed as she ran her fingers through my sepia shaded hair. “Well, you understand that Papa is a very busy man and that he has to leave occasionally because of it?” I nodded slightly indicating to her that I understood, “now because of the whole declaration he has been called up to fight for Britain”. I felt paralysed. My body mentally shut down. I couldn’t even look at Ma and I couldn’t believe that Pa just left like that – without saying goodbye. Those words played on loop inside my mind “... fight for Britain ... fight for Britain ... fight for Britain.”

It only took a few minutes for me to storm away from my chair and say something I regretted; I turned around and sent a sombre expression towards her “well you know why he left to fight? It’s because of you – it’s your fault – he wouldn’t of left if you stopped complaining about everything he does!” My Ma just looked at me shocked. She struggled to regain her words that I stole from her, “It was a compulsorily enrolled – he had to leave for the service” she said smoothly although I didn’t accept her words. It wasn’t enough to repair my broken heart that had been slashed through with hell’s sharp blade. “That’s it? That’s all you have to say to me? Not even a slight word of reassurance! Did it ever occur to you that a big part of my life has been torn away from me as well because right now it shows that you don’t even care!” I cried the truth. I just had no other way to express my sadness.

I ran upstairs – crying my heart out. I tried to trust my instinct to lead me somewhere considering my hands were covering my weeping eyes. I just felt like I was going back in time because I ended up back into the bedroom – I sat down with my head resting on my knees behind the door – I just didn’t give a care if my sister was awake or not. I just didn’t give a care if Mother was banging on the door. I just didn’t give a care about anyone anymore apart from my dearest Father who I will miss dearly.

20th November 1939 13:27 pm – Getting used to my reality

Private Raymond Ainsworth. That’s Papa’s new title. Mama said that you get special titles when you’re assigned positions in the war – in Papa’s case, he is fighting on the frontline – looking over something called No Man’s Land. Apparently it’s a large unoccupied ground that is disputed between the British and Germans but Ma believes that both parties are just too scared to accompany it with their sides. It’s been exactly two weeks since Papa’s departure and my emotional breakdown but I decided to just let it be the past considering that I’m not powerful enough to bring my Papa back from the life-stealing war – I just had to keep praying; asking God to protect Papa from the worst.

Despite the need for my Father, I also had to attend school. I do appreciate being there nevertheless benefiting from it: I get to frolic with my friends and learn all new things. It’s also a place where I can just lock myself out of my problems and focus on other things such as English and Arithmetic. Today however was quite disquieting and practically invaded all my beliefs of school as well as my safety. It all began when Joyce, Kathleen, Diane and I

were playing jacks – one of our favourite games – when we suddenly heard an orchestra of loud screeching and loose strings – a song of teachers' shouts with other children's screams and the sound of thumping feet banging against the concrete floor. "Now quickly children in single file – please follow Miss Barnett and Mr Corey to the air raid shelters and follow their every command!" We immediately dropped our activity and rushed to find those specific teachers; my heart pounding out of my chest.

As we caught the end of the line, we started to move rapidly down into a darkened 'shed' known as an air raid shelter. I didn't really know what its purpose was nor what that deafening siren was and I didn't bother to ask because I was too terrified. Instead I just sat on the long narrow bench that was fixed into the shelter, silent like the other students with their heads bowed down at the floor. I just couldn't stop panicking. Am I going to die? A 14 year old corpse laying within the rubble and remains of others. What about Linda? Mama wouldn't be happy with me if I lost her nonetheless if she died. I felt confined in darkness and to find the key was more or less impossible; I felt like crying but I knew I couldn't – I couldn't break the silence and draw attention from the thinking children that followed after me on the bench.

I wonder if maybe Papa has to do this as well? - every time that siren goes off.

14th March 1941, 12:15 pm. – Celebrations without Papa

I guess you can say it's my special day and probably for many others all around the world. So maybe our special day. A whole day just to celebrate the birth of a child – may it be a new born or the elderly but for me I'm being blessed with the age of 16. I head downstairs towards the kitchen as usual or at least following the scent of what seems to be Mama's fruit cake recipe; in order words the best cake in the neighbourhood! All I can say is that it tastes delicious!

I walk in with a big grin on my face – just so happy to see Mama and Linda sat on either side of the cake which was outlined with gifts. I greet and join them who then urged me to open my presents: a beautiful burgundy wool and Persian lamb coat with black swing heels and a Billie Holiday vinyl. I thank them dearly for everything – the gifts they gave I'm massively grateful for and overall just happy to be cherished with the company of my family – not exactly everybody but I knew Papa knows. He never forgets.

Grateful as I am for the day's outcome so far, it was unfortunately Mama's time to go to work – women all around the world have to work most days because the government requires them to do it; taking over the jobs that the men left behind: mechanics, engineers, building ships, working in factories (making bombs and aircraft parts), you name it, the women do it. However my Mother works at the Women's Land Army – looking after animals, ploughing through fields and harvesting crops – she said that it does affect her back severely but she doesn't take the time to recover due to lack of income anyway; earning around £1.16 shillings every working week with a minimum of 50 hours.

Linda was also leaving. She has a play date arranged with her best friend Mary which is also great considering it gave me the perfect excuse to head out into town to go meet Edward. Edward was a handsomely dashing man I have been secretly meeting up with and to be perfectly honest I do believe I am falling for him. Therefore I dolled myself up; wearing my slim black dress with my brand new coat and heels; my hair in pin curls and my make up was just the perfect finishing touch to my complexion.

I have to say I looked stunning; probably the best I have ever looked for a while, even Linda agreed with me! So after walking with Linda to Mary's home, I headed towards the Pier to meet my darling Edward., By now I knew I was close; the sun reflected against the ocean

pleasantly like a sea of diamonds and the chilled breeze blew gently through my hair – the 6 foot silhouette of his broad figure instantly stood out from all the rest. As I became closer to him, I then began to capture his auburn brown hair and his prepossessing green eyes; he smiles at me and began to approach where he then greets me with a small box – I was curious at first because it was quite unexpected but as I open this small box, my face starts to glow with delight. It was a beautiful piece that he then fixed around my neck; I turn around to regain eye contact with him and when I jumped into his strong, loving arms and he swings me around as we laughed in unison, “thank you so much, it’s absolutely wonderful!” I exclaimed happily.

We stared into each other’s eyes deeply; his warming embrace sent shivers down my spine. I was lost in his trance, unaware of everything else. Suddenly, his face leant forward and his lips instantly touched mine. It was incredible – an unexplored sensation ran through my mind and sadly stopped when he let go – it was like he stole the words straight from my mouth and I just stuttered words, “Wow”.

23rd June 16:45 pm – the telegram

I still couldn’t get over that ... that ... kiss! I agree that we have done it multiple times now but they were nothing compared to that one and I knew if Papa found out he would be furious and would also know that I disobeyed his strict rule on love. I guess he was only trying to protect me. Luckily Mama finds our relationship adorably acceptable.

It was a wet and grim afternoon; Edward and I were arriving home from our afternoon walk round the countryside, although as we walked in I notice Mama crying heavily in her arms. I rush over to her quickly to comfort her as best as possible until I caught the glimpse of the small yellow piece of card held firmly in Ma’s hand. I stood up from my chair and cover my mouth while shaking my head: Edward approached me and rubbed my arms for comfort. “Why didn’t you come find me?” I ask Mama – staring at the card. “Why do you think?” I froze. Still glaring at the bright yellow card mocking my emotions; I turn to Edward and look up at him as he glares down into tearing eyes – I run into him with open arms and sink my head into his chest and the tears come flowing down my face, “No, no, no!” I cried. Mama walked over to me cautiously and touched my shoulder gently, “Papa loves you, Judy – things like this can sometimes be wrong – I promise he will come home soon.” I turned to face Mama, giving me a measly smile, and take the telegram from her, “You shouldn’t give promises that you can’t keep” I sobbed as I let go of Ed. I ran outside – heading towards my quiet place where my friends and I (when we were little) used to go when we were upset or stressed. “Judy!” I hear Edward and Mama shout but I ignore them.

I began to gradually get closer to my utopia – arriving at the large log that rested by a little pond that sat beside it. I set myself down on the log and look up towards the sky – I sighed deeply and looked back down to the yellow telegram held in both hands – I read the bold writing printing on the card out loud. “Missing in Action”.

25th April 1944: 14.39 pm – romantic picnics

I had been waiting for many days. Many weeks. Many months. Years go by and I still waited for just something. Anything. The thought of not knowing where your Father could be and the fact he could be dead is like poison to the mind. Since that telegram arrived in our lives in 1941, everything started to change. Ma became depressed; she developed to become a less co-operative woman and wouldn’t leave the house unless she worked; she would cry most nights and would become sick from the lack of sleep and nutrition. Edward and his Father work at the War Office and would therefore always give us updates but usually there was no luck. I had to stay strong – I had to be there for Mama and not let her

waste her life away. I would shop for things she needed using up my rations to buy them and generally make sure she looked after herself properly.

After I walked Mama up to work, Edward had a big surprise for me; I was so excited but so desperate to know what it was. Just as we arrived, Edward covered my eyes and guided me towards to what sounds like the birds tweeting. We then suddenly stopped and he uncovered my eyes – I blinked rapidly due to the sudden change in brightness but as I focused down I noticed a large red and white checkered blanket with Ed lying across it. I gasped with joy – a picnic in the countryside! How romantic! After being enlightened with a lovely surprise, I placed myself down on the picnic blanket and kissed Edward softly, “thank you darling, it’s wonderful!” He looked at me with happiness, “it’s my pleasure, anything for you,” I cooed at his comment; he then opened the wicker basket and we started to enjoy the deliciously prepared food.

It was really delightful just to spend a few hours away from the stress at home. Edward received a scrumptious-looking dessert and played it in front of me. “I won’t be able to eat all of that!” I exclaimed as he laughed at my comment. I gave him a confused expression and he just laughed harder, “take a closer look.” I did what I was told and lowered my face down to the dessert – suddenly I captured something glistening within the icing; it looked like a ... ring! I picked it out and Edward then took it from me.

“Judy Ainsworth, we have been together for quite a long period now and I have loved every second of it! I would love for it to stay like this – will you marry me?” His deep voice went straight through me – I gasped loudly and pounced for a hug – I lay on the luscious green grass whilst he sheltered over me. “I will!” I whispered and kissed him gently.

20th October 1945 – the wedding.

A lot more has changed now since Edward proposed: the War finally ended! There was a massive celebration in dedication to this day, VE Day. Mama recovered massively from her depression; when I told her she was jumping for joy – she was so happy for us both and obviously of course our wedding! The neighbours helped me get ready in my gown and fix my hair whilst Mama helped Linda. When I was just about ready I carefully walked into the living room to see Mama and Linda finishing up. Mama noticed my entrance and turned to face me – she just stood there smiling at me with her eyes filling with tears. Tears of joy. She walked over to me and kissed me on the cheek, “Judy, you look beautiful!” Mama stuttered a bit due to the lack of speech, “Don’t cry, Ma, otherwise you will start me off” laughed, trying to hold back the tears. “Sorry, darling, I just can’t believe this is happening.”

As I arrived at the venue, I was quickly guided to where I was supposed to be; I watched Linda walk down the aisle gracefully – she looked gorgeous! It was now my turn to head down the aisle; I took a deep breath and walked slowly down, looking straight towards Edward in his handsome suit. Lost in his trance again. Then I woke up too and unexpectedly halted – guarded by an arm barrier. I look to my left and followed up the arm that stopped me. “Papa? ... Is that you?” I mumbled as I instantly began to cry and cover my mouth quickly. “Yes it is, sweetheart”. I gasp at his speech – it really was him! I hug him strongly – I didn’t want to let go. He lowered his arms and linked his arm with mine and continued to walk down the aisle; he hands me over to Edward and we then look at the vicar who waited for everyone’s attention.

“Dearly Beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God – and in the face of this company – to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is commended to be honourable among all men; and therefore – is not by any – to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly – but reverently, discreetly, advisedly and solemnly. Into this holy

estate these two persons present now come to be joined. If any person can show just cause why they may not be joined together – let them speak now or forever hold their peace ...” The vicar continued his humble words as I look straight into Edward’s eyes. “Do you, Udy Ainsowrth, take Edward Dane to be your husband – to live together after God’s ordinance – in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honour and keep him, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, in sadness and in joy, to cherish and continually bestow upon him your heart’s deepest devotion, forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto him as long as you both shall live?”

I was silent for a moment; my whole life is changing – my Father’s home from the war, I have a great soon-to-be husband, my life couldn’t get any better than this, right>

As I finished my quick thinking I look back at Edward and I then notice myself saying ... “I do ...”