

Silent scream

I stared down at the crumpled letter nestled in my hand. The date was scrawled in the top corner in black ink, 16th December 1914, and that was possibly the only thing I could read on the letter. It was clearly censored as the letter was covered with crudely, blacked out words, so now it read:

Dear Alfie,
Hope you're good.
James

I felt anger bubbling beneath the surface of my placid exterior, not because of what the letter said but because of what it didn't say. If the words were censored it meant the war wasn't going as well as they say in the papers, it means that our boys were still out there and... it means I don't know if my brother will come home.

I glanced at the date again, which I could barely see through my mop of unruly dirty-blond hair, which was two days ago. Christmas was just 6 days away. They had broken their promise.

I stared at the Christmas tree across from me, a few decorations wilting on its branches; I wasn't in the mood for celebrating Christmas. Not without James, not without my brother.

I remembered how at the start of the war young men and old flocked to sign up for the army. They left smiling, waving, with promises of being home by Christmas, they weren't. Of course there were the few who didn't leave to fight for Queen and Country, like Mr. Morison across the street, but now they are outcast from society.

I crumpled the paper in my hand as I felt the anger well up inside of me. They never told me that my brother may not come home or that we may not win or that we shouldn't have got involved. They never told me because I was a child, I couldn't care about what was happening, but I do.

I remember when the war was first announced my brother said to me "They should take off the rose-tinted glasses, as if we would be home by Christmas," but he still left. Why?

When my mom came home we prepared our dinner, lamb's heart hot pot; waited for dad to come home. When the war was announced dad didn't go because he made an excuse about having difficulty with his sight but I know the truth, he was scared. I can see it in his eyes now as he says how well the war is going, while taking off his coat. I can see it in all their eyes. Fear. They're scared of what will happen. They're afraid.

I ate my meal in silence trying not to stare at the empty seat at the table, where James should be, a hole in my heart, I could feel a sense of helplessness in me. Why did they let him go? He may be dead, I thought with a gulp, and I wouldn't know, wouldn't get to bury him. "Why did you let him go," I blurted aloud before I could stop myself, "Why did he have to go and fight?" My parents stare at me shocked and I don't hear their replies as I run to my room. Lying on my bed I sob into my pillow. He won't have a proper Christmas. Shaken and hollow from crying I stare out the window and see a single star illuminated in the ink black sky. I stared at it and made a wish.

The next morning I was staring at my bowl when the post came. "Can you get the post," dad called. Begrudgingly I got up and picked up the single letter. My stomach dropped.

It was from the army.

It was one of those letters that you filled out. My thoughts were racing, performing a complicated dance in my brain. Calm down. Maybe James is receiving an award. I forced my eyes back towards the letter. I skimmed over the words,

"By his majesty's command...message of sympathy...death."

I couldn't breathe, it couldn't be true. My mind whirled. James was dead. In that split second I heard a piercing scream. I glanced around wildly for any recognition that someone else had heard it, but no, it was a silent scream. The silent scream of my brother echoing in my ears, the silent scream of soldiers as they crumpled to the ground on the battlefield. So many screams, so loud. I crumpled to the floor.

"Are you ok? Darling, wake up," it was a voice. "Mum?" I asked blearily. "Yes" she cradled my head in her hands. "He's gone," I wailed, "why is he gone." "I'm sorry," mum replied. We stayed there for a while, crying. We had always known deep down it was a possibility, but I didn't expect it to happen. It was so raw and hurtful I couldn't think of anything else.

The war changed my life so much. Now there is a hole in our lives that wouldn't ever be filled. We can't ignore that on Christmas day there is a pile of presents unopened or that there is always an empty room in our house now, or that there is a place waiting to be filled at the dinner table. I heard his silent scream and I ask myself.

Why?

Why did he go?