

THE WOMAN WHO WENT TO WAR

JASMINE WILKINSON

KILMODAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

AGE: 10

I NEVER THOUGHT DEATH COULD TAKE SO LONG. LYING THERE, BREATHING FAINTLY, I AM SO TIRED, MY EYES KEEP CLOSING. MY THROAT FEELS SCRATCHY AND MY TONGUE IS LIKE SANDPAPER. THE ATMOSPHERE IS STUFFY IN HERE, IT IS LIKE BEING COOKED UNDER THE MIDDAY SUN.

WHAT I WOULD GIVE NOW TO FEEL THE BREEZE ON MY FACE AND TO SEE AN OPEN BLUE SKY ABOVE ME. INSTEAD I AM IN A CLOSED-OFF STERILE ROOM WITH GREY LINING CURTAINS MOTIONLESS AROUND ME. I HEAR A SOB TO MY LEFT, A MUTTERING TO MY RIGHT, THE DOCTORS CONVERSING SECRETLY AMONGST THEMSELVES.

I KNEW DEATH WAS APPROACHING, WAITING TO SHOW HIS FACE UNTIL MY LAST FAINT BREATH, I COULD GO WITHOUT COMPLAINT AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME, BUT I HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL MY GRANDDAUGHTER CHERYL...

I KNEW CHERYL WAS FALLING APART, I WAS ALL SHE HAD ON THIS EARTH. I COULD SEE HER OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE, SOBBING AND CRYING LIKE A CHILD. HER PARENTS; MY DAUGHTER ELIZABETH AND HER HUSBAND JAMES DIED IN A TRAGIC CAR ACCIDENT WHEN CHERYL WAS SEVEN. SINCE THEN CHERYL HAD BEEN MY WORLD AND I HERS.

CHEAP DISINFECTANT HUNG IN MY NOSTRILS, I SHIFTED SLIGHTLY AND MUMBLED QUIETLY AND MOVED MY HAND TOWARDS HERS'. CHERYL HAD THE SAME CLOUDY BLUE-GREEN EYES I HAD, BUT SHE HAD MORE FREEDOM IN HER OWN. HER PALE HANDS SHOT TO THE WATER JUG ON THE BEDSIDE TABLE, SHE Poured SOME INTO A CERAMIC MUG AND CAREFULLY PLACED IT INTO MY SHAKING HANDS. AS HER HANDS CUPPED MINE, I SIPPED THE ALMOST-STALE WATER. AS MY THROAT WELCOMED THE COOL LIQUID, SUDDENLY MEMORIES CAME FLOODING BACK, MEMORIES OF ANOTHER LIFETIME, MEMORIES OF YEARS AGO...