

I'm in Cardiff when a white feather is handed to me. The woman handing it off is solemn, but her eyes are venomous. Those eyes linger in wait. My fist simply clenches around the feather, and I walk off.

This city is one I visit periodically. Every few months, I arrive in my Ford Model T, the noise deafening me more every second I spend driving. Somehow, the city usually drowns out the engine. Every sound imaginable combined into one. The peal of chaos.

Today, the city is quiet. The fragility of the air matches that of the feather. Without the men, there is no chaos. With the war, there is only fear. A few streets down sits the post office, where I go to fill out shipping charts to export my crops. The postman's face sinks when he sees me enter. We both know how many farmers have been reduced to poverty.

I sit and write, left hand still gripping the feather fervently. When I at last unclench my fist, it's been crumpled, like chicken wire in the process of becoming a fence. The feather is stuffed into my pocket.

An empty bench beckons me outside of the shop. My hands grab the rails to steady myself as I sit. Though I can no longer see the feather, I feel its weight dragging me down. The quiet forces me to be alone with my thoughts. The daggers of the womens eyes still stab into mine. *What are you waiting for?*

What am I waiting for? Or better yet, why do I not yet want to die?

At home, waiting for me is my wife. She is the definition of beauty, hair curled and lips permanently pursed in amusement. Faint lines are brushed across her forehead, little compared to those that mangle mine. Her stomach is round, an indication of her late pregnancy. In her arms is my daughter. Every time I look at her, it is almost like looking into a mirror. She has my hair and grin. We have identical eyes.

In our backyard is a tree. It's just a sapling, a few feet tall, and was planted nearly a year ago. Some days, I'll sit with my wife and observe it. It's hard to imagine such a small plant could possibly grow into a towering tree. We've made a promise to watch it grow, just like our children. It will take thirty years. We're patient.

A few miles away, in the home of my mother, lies my father. He is sprawled across a bed, stick thin and asleep. Slowly, he is dying. It hit suddenly and has worsened over the course of a few months. I visit, but the sight of him so sickly makes me ill. How my mother bears it, I'm unsure. He's hardly awake anymore, only to groan in pain or get sick on the floor. I love my father more than anything. Some days, he will be awake, and we'll talk. Receiving news of his death in writing would be a wound I could never recover from.

My mother is on her way to the soup kitchen, where she feeds those without money and housing. That is many, considering the amount of houses that have been bombed by the Germans. On her way, she'll stop by my brother's grave. The graveyard is along her way, ever growing with young bodies. He was young too. After his death on the battlefield, I was unsure if she would make it. She stopped eating, stopped talking. Stopped crying, and began to just stare at the wall. Grief is never easy, and for her, it's a plague. My death would be fatal.

With shaking hands I pull the feather from my pocket. Is this a token of my cowardice? I am fighting my own battle, yet that is not enough. Men have gone to fight, men with pregnant wives and dying fathers. Most men are willing to die for their country. Is my lack of willingness to fight proof of my lack of faith in my country? That woman certainly seemed to think so. Every day, more and more men depart for the battlefield. I am left behind, but my eyes sometimes eye the registration building. When soldiers return, they're treated with respect and admiration. I, the

lone male hiding from battle, am instead treated with hostility and judgment. Would going to war change my life for the better?

The quiet of the city leaves me alone with my thoughts.