

Picturing Rosie

I wake to the sound of a bugle. The same thing that wakes me every morning. At first it's irritating, but four years at war can get you used to a bugle; no matter how cacophonous. I have to blink a few times to adjust to the light. The only light being a sky of clouds, smoke and ash. The rats scurry along the floor and a good percentage of the men around me are coughing up their lungs. This is life in the trenches. Everyday could be your last; the only thing that keeps me going is the letters from home. Rebecca writes updates on our daughter Rosie, only three years old. I can only picture her face and her curly red hair, having never seen her. What I wouldn't give to be home, to see them.

"What you thinking about Major?"

I turn to see a fellow soldier and good colleague of mine. "My family, Alistair. I haven't had a letter for a while."

"Ah, I trust little Rosie is in good health then and your wife too?" He asks.

I nod, a little doubtfully. "As far as I know." I sigh, miserably.

"I'm sure they'll be just fine, Andrew. I haven't heard from my Kate in weeks, but I know she's fine." Alistair says good-naturedly.

"How do you know?"

He half-smiles, "I can feel it in here." He taps his chest, right where the heart should be.

Before I have the chance to reply, a loud terrifying yell comes from behind me. A sound a soldier never wants to hear.

"GAS! GAS! GAS!"

I fumble for my gas mask, but stop as soon as the murky green vapour sears my eyes. Then blackness.

"We are now coming up to Earls Colne, fellas. Anyone for Earls Colne better get ready!" The ticket man announces cheerfully. Why wouldn't he be cheerful? The war is finally over and we are home. I am home.

I fumble for my bag and stand up. Using my arms to feel my way down the train, I shuffle slowly, trying to figure out where the doors are. I feel the train slow down and I stumble, but strong hands keep me upright.

"You injured son?"

"Blind sir."

"Ah. Then, as a fellow countryman and soldier it is my duty to escort you to your family," he says kindly.

"Thank you sir."

The train pulls to a stop and my companion guides me off the train. Although I cannot see, I can hear and feel the groups of people waiting on the platform anxious for the return of their loved ones.

"What does your girl look like, son?"

"Andrew?"

My heart starts to beat rapidly. "Rebecca?" I reach out my arm gingerly, trying to find her.

"I'm here, I'm right here." She cries and hugs me tightly.

"Mummy? Is that daddy?" I hear a wispy voice over the noise of the train.

I crouch down and open my arms. "Yes, it's me Rosie. I'm home."