

BECKY MEDCALF

The Telegram

As a tear rolled down her smooth white cheek, she looked at her son. His eyes were gleaming bright green; his innocence shone out of them. He was wearing all his cousins' second hand clothes: a shirt that had once been white but had faded over the years; his blue jumper that was worn at the elbows. His shorts were held up with a black belt, and on his chest was a badge that he wore with pride. It was his father's Defence Medal.

The woman was tall and slim, wearing a thin floral dress that flowed down her body. A brown leather belt with a gold buckle was hanging round her tiny waist. Her shoes were old and worn, and you could see the red skin on her heels from where the shoes had been rubbing. She had a big heavy coat on, as if she expected it to rain. Her hair was curly and pinned to the top of her head. The only imperfection on her face was a crinkle between her eyebrows: fear.

They were at the park. It was midday and the sun was high up in the sky, but it still seemed cold. The grass was brown and crisp and seemed to have a thin layer of dust settling on the surface; the trees stood, weak in the wind, swaying and creaking. The buildings that surrounded the park were a mixture; some were what you would expect: grey brick with four windows and a door made of a dark wood, a little garden with some vegetables growing and a small mound which was easily recognisable as a bomb shelter. Then there were the other houses; some had great chunks of them missing. One had the front of the house blown off. You could see inside like a dolls house: the kitchen was in pieces, wooden furniture charred from the blast; the sofa in the next room had springs sticking out of it, and a family picture lay on the ground, the glass broken.

The little boy was banging a stick against the green metal railing as they walked down the path, bang, bang, bang. The beat reminded his mother of the train the day her husband left for the war. She was standing on the busy station platform, with her son in her arms. There were men in uniform running to get on the train, women and children crying, waving their men off. She remembered the strong smell of smoke and struggling to breathe. She remembered looking in her husband's green eyes that reminded her so much of her son. "I will miss you Tom!" She almost shouted the words as the train made a terrifying squealing noise.

"I know, Susan, I love you. So whatever happens to me, I need you to know that I love you!" There was a pause. "Do you know that Susan? Do you know I love you?" he said, with a scared and pleading look in his eyes.

"I know, Tom. I love you too! And don't worry; you will be back in no time," she said, with a forced smile appearing on her face. He saw the doubt in her eyes, but stayed strong. He kissed her; she remembered feeling his cold tear touching her cheek. He pulled away from her and held her face in his hands; he gently wiped the tear of her smooth skin with his thumb. Then he looked at his son: he was so young.

"You are going to grow into a handsome man some day, and I hope I will be there to see it. I love you, son!" He kissed him on the forehead.

As he turned to leave, the little boy tried to grab after him.

Tom turned to look at him for a split second. Susan could see the tears forming in his eyes. He quickly turned away again and got on the train. He sat by the window and smiled out at his young family.

Susan picked up her son's hand and waved it gently as the train started to pull away; tears started falling rapidly down her cheeks, her feet seemed to have a mind of their own and, before she knew it, she was running down the platform, the little boy swinging from side to side on her hip. She shouted, "Come back to me, Thomas!" She kept saying over and over, "Make sure you come back to me!" Finally, she could run no more, and then Tom and the train were gone and all that was on the platform were the families, and hope.

The kicking of a ball woke Susan up from her trance. The children were running around her. Her son looked up at her. "Mom, can I play with them?" he asked, excitedly.

"Of course you can, darling," she smiled and waved him over. She sat on a bench nearby and watched her son. He had so much life in him; he was so unaware of the world and its problems. Her mind started to wander and she remembered the day she got the telegram. It was every woman's worst nightmare; she had been dreading it for months, never knowing who would be on the other side of the door.

It was autumn and she was washing dishes in the kitchen, looking out of the window in a daydream. As she was doing this, a black car pulled up by the house. An older gentleman got out first; he was in uniform with his hat under his arm and a solemn look on his face. A second man got out of the car. He was in a dark brown suit with a matching tie; his hair was slicked back off his face. As he got out of the car, he turned and looked at the house. His eyes darted from the number on the door, then to the woman standing inside.

Her stomach tightened; Susan knew what it meant. She dropped the plates she was holding. They smashed to the floor. Her knees buckled; she fell to the ground. "Please, no! You have the wrong house! He promised to come back! Please! Please! Not Tom! Not Tom!" She put her face in her hands and started to sob hysterically.

The men had let themselves in and the man in the uniform pulled her to her feet. He then handed her a small yellow envelope with black printed writing on the front. She didn't have to open it; she knew what it meant: killed in action.

"Mrs Mosley, I am sorry for your loss. Your husband was a great man and a greater soldier!" the man in the brown suit said, in a gentle and honest voice.

They realised that she wanted them to leave; they both nodded their heads at her tear-stained face and her shaking frame and left the house. As they were walking through the garden, the man in the uniform spotted a blue bike with the name "Thomas" engraved on the side, and standing above it, a boy with a grave look in his green eyes. He smiled at the boy and saluted him, and then they were gone as quickly as they had arrived.