

## Healing

### Fall 1939

World War Two, a second helping of international throttling; many experienced the first, and many more are in waiting to experience the second. I fall into the latter, not even being close to my 17th birthday. It's September, the warm licks of summer have yet to depart, when Canada announces its official concurrence to this freshly blooming war. Fall 1939 has not only been a change for our country, but for me. My maturity shows in the brightening of my eyes, the quiver of my brain holding more than just boyish whims, but a necessity for understanding. I want to join up. Yes, I may be a bit young... but my courageous spirit, and burning patriotism give me more merit as a soldier than a man twice my age!

### Winter 1940

The crashing waves of war are in full swing. I cannot just sit dilly dallying around, my only tether to the war being what I observe in the news, or hear from hushed whispers. My father has a bum leg from an injury suffered in his teen years. If I leave, my sister and Mother will be cared for. I have no responsibilities here at home. It is becoming increasingly obvious what I must do. On an unseasonably warm day, I tie up my winter boots and make my way down to the town office, decision made, inhibitions smothered. It only takes a few bluffed papers and a charming smile to be accepted, my shoulders rolled back, chin up I hum with mannish effervescence.

### Spring 1940

My mother's attempts to change my mind have been unsuccessful. I leave this afternoon. It is a damp spring day, my kid sister runs and giggles in the yard, blissfully unaware. My departure, my dedication, all for her. She deserves a future. Suitcases wait by the door, twiddling their thumbs in impatience. Father looks down on me, pride tinged with the fear any parent has for their child. A silent gasp tumbles from my mother, filling the space with a thick sense of premeditated grief. I kiss my sister on the cheek, hug my father and let my mother cry into my shoulder. When the door swings shut behind me I step into a new portion of my life, the change seeming surprisingly palpable.

### Summer 1945

I have lost myself to this war, my boyhood stolen. At the age of 23 I feel like I have lived a million lives, watching my friends die and wither in front of me. Silence buzzes around me, fingers tapping my rifle, the warmth of metal tickling in my fingers. I sit at this post, alone, I've been pulled from the front lines and shoved here, solitary confinement if you will. The doc said that after my years in the field, after the things I've seen, I have developed a disease: shell shock. They say I've changed, I don't know how to respond to that, I can't even remember who I was before this damn war. The days rush behind me like a roaring river, and I am stuck here stagnant.

### **Fall 1945**

I am going home. Of course I have visited my family over the years, but it is a shock to see them now. The crinkles around my fathers eyes have deepened, and his hair lightened to a sophisticated grey. The look in my mother's eye has lost its inquisitive edge, dimmed down to an even, sullen glance. My sister calls out to me, what was once a young girl is now a young woman, her smile clear and shining. I pick her up in a big hug, give my mother a kiss and grasp my father harder than I ever have before. The laughter of my family starts to wilt under my tears, I fall to my knees and cry, I haven't cried, I didn't think I could. Everything dies away and I am alone, there is a ringing pulling at my chest. I curl into myself with a feeling that the war will never release me.

### **Winter 1945**

It has been a fight to try and be happy. I feel like I am betraying all who died every time I smile with my friends, or laugh around the dinner table. The guilt wafts off of me like smoke from a forest fire, but I am still trying. I bought my sister a Christmas present, I helped my mom cook Thanksgiving dinner, and my father and I play chess in the evenings. I never thought how grateful I could be to just exist. To live in the presence of people who love me. Stability is worth all of the money in the world. I spent years fighting, now I must win the battle of becoming myself again.