

The Reason

"I came home one beautiful day in mid-June of 1945. At this point, I had seen enough to be grateful that the skies were not littered with bomber planes, or artillery, or smoke, let alone that they were blue and sunny. But this brought me no comfort. I had just spent five dreadful years in war with the Allies. I was still trying desperately just to look in front of me and not be reminded of a haunting memory."

"I stepped off the train at my home town station, and something hit me. Not a bullet or debris this time, but a realization. Why was I even here? I had next to nothing. My father died when I was young, and I had no siblings. It was just my mother now, but she was lucky enough to be alive at all and couldn't welcome me. Even those who could welcome somebody home seemed saddened and relieved over joyful, as if they were reliving the agony all over again, in disbelief that they held their loved one again."

"But I was alone."

"In despair, I left the train station, and went on to my home. It had become worn and lifeless with my mother's illness, nothing like it was when I was a child. And as I went inside, I could not hold back a flood of tears."

"My mother was in bed. I had been informed in my absence that she had a seemingly terminal case of pneumonia. She was unable to afford good treatment for some years now, so a volunteer nurse took care of her at home instead. Our neighbour, Mrs. Abbott, who I knew had lost her son in the war."

"I ran to Mother. Even in her condition, she managed to sit up."

"The look my mother had on her face will never leave me."

"She buried her head in her hands as I rushed to her side. Her face, twisted with emotion and flooded with tears, was pressed against mine. She couldn't let go. I knew why. She had lost so much. Her health, her husband, and almost her only child. She couldn't give up the one thing she had left."

“Something changed inside me now. My mother had had too difficult a life. And I had accomplished nothing by leaving. I had risked my life, as my mother sat here bedridden and the world just as broken as when I left it.”

“So what was the reason? Why was I here, alive? Why had I even left in the first place?”

“It took ages, almost a lifetime, for me to find my purpose. As the years went by, people remembered my friends that had died heroes. Services were held. Memorials went up. Older fathers honored their sons that had died. But it seemed like I had nothing. And after my mother died, I regretted leaving even more, thinking I could have saved her.”

“But then one day everything changed.”

“I was married now, with young children. The world was coming back together, and it seemed like maybe I could live my life now and forget about the horrible past.”

“It was one simple question from my young daughter that transformed everything.”

“She said: ‘Father, what was the war like?’”

“Suddenly, all of the feelings I had felt, during and after the war, knocked me so hard that I seemed to feel a physical blow. And that was when it came to me.”

“The reason why I left, the reason for all the death: it all became clear in that moment.”

“It was for her.”

“All of the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that I had felt over the years suddenly vanished. Some like me had lived, many had died, and all had suffered so *she* could be free. Seeing the next generation able to live without fear, to be free, and to hear the stories of old gave me my purpose. I realized then that the most powerful thing I could give to anyone *was* remembrance. That’s the reason I was there that day. I couldn’t forget. I was there to remember.”

“And it is why I am here today, at this Remembrance Day service,” the veteran said.

“I am here so you can know about the stories of war, and the people, my friends, who paid the cost for your freedom. So that I can give you empathy. So we can honor those who died by living to uphold freedom that *they* died for. We all play a part in Remembrance Day. There is a reason for each of us being here.”

“The reason I’m here today is to tell you what happened.”

“And the reason you’re here? To hear the story, to remember it, and to share it with the world.”