

Stories for Lipreading



THE LAST ONE by Pat Kelly.

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]

Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this story, which is called 'The Last One' by Pat Kelly.

The Last One by Pat Kelly.

My jaw snapped as he smashed my head with his rifle. I felt warm blood soak my clothes as he stabbed my arm. I knew I had to appear dead, like the rest of my family. He'd hurt me to save me. He was unable to rescue them.

I fell in love with Pavel when I visited the hospital for wounded officers with my sisters in 1914. He was clever and handsome. A talented artist, he drew my portrait and gave it to me. Years later, during our imprisonment, I scandalised my parents, who saw me kissing him. They scorned me for my disloyal behaviour: thought him an enemy. They weren't to know soon I'd owe him my life. Abandoning his career and everyone he loved, we escaped, travelling thousands of miles to make a good life in this gentle place. The people took us into their hearts: accepted two strange and weary foreigners into their community without question. Our children were born here. They know nothing of our previous lives.

The sea glistens in the distance, beyond our fields and pastures. The cows are gathered patiently by the gate. Pavel will never milk them again. Downstairs, our girls and their families are waiting. Last night, with our friends and neighbours, we walked with him on his last journey, from the farm to the ancient chapel. It's the custom here. Melodious Irish voices sang the Catholic hymns and whispered the prayers of a religion which was not ours. We left him to rest alone in that holy place. Only I know his name, and only he knew mine. Here, we're simply Paul and Mary, parents of four daughters. Our only boy died as a baby from the sickness of the blood. Today father and son will lie together at last, under the same kind soil.

It's time. Straightening my hat, I take my best gloves from the drawer. The diamonds stuffed into the fingers spill out in a brilliant stream, sparkling like the icicles of my childhood. Some once encircled my mother's neck, where my chubby fingers played with them. I hide them under old newspaper clippings and photographs stored in a box. The cuttings are all about my family. I still have many living relatives. They don't know I'm alive. It's better that way. I often watch them through the small window of my television set: seeing the life I might have lived. I don't envy them.

When I'm dead, my daughters will know who I am: who they are. The proof is with a solicitor, safely sealed. It will be up to them what they do with it. I hope they choose well. The documents

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show the terrible truth about that night of slaughter, the heroism of their father and our journey here, helped by friends and caring strangers.

On top of the papers lies Pavel's drawing from seventy years ago, entitled "The Grand Duchess Maria; aged fourteen." The last daughter of murdered Tsar Nicholas, I lock the box and go downstairs as Mary.