

Stories for Lipreading



WAITING 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 'Waiting' by Pat Kelly.

Waiting by Pat Kelly.

I saw him last night. Something woke me, perhaps moonlight slicing through a gap in the curtains. He smiled at me and blew me a kiss as I reached up to him. Arms wide, I embraced emptiness. While John snuffled and grunted beside me like a sleeping bear I travelled, searching a treeless wilderness. My feet sank deep into oozing slime. A poisonous miasma hung in the air, scorching lungs and burning skin. My ears ached from the boom and thunder of invisible guns. I didn't find him. I slept late, daylight ungluing my gritty eyelids. John had gone and the bed was cold and empty beside me.

He'd been home for Christmas. Manhood and war had hardened the boyish curves of his face. Spiders' webs of fine lines encircled eyes which had faded from blue to grey, aged by horror. Black curls brutally shorn, replaced by a velvet of dark stubble under the ugly cap. I'd sponged and brushed his filthy uniform, shaken it free of lice and the smell of decay. Hanging outside on the line it froze, dangling stiff, cold and empty. It didn't bend when I clasped it to me to bring it inside. I'd made up a stocking for him, but this year the small treats were different, utilitarian. The woollen shape was contorted by warm socks, gloves, vests and underpants, a razor, soap and tobacco. I'd even knitted him a balaclava. But, for the boy that was, the toe contained an orange, walnuts, a bright new penny, and an apple from the tree in the garden. I'd saved that last fruit, the last of those he'd picked before he left. Like a miser, I'd polished it until it shone bright as a rosy gem, wrapped it in blue tissue and hidden it in the larder.

This morning I waited, knowing; a cup of tea cooling beside me. Slow, reluctant footsteps crunched on the path, paused, shuffled, fidgeted. A rat-a-tat-tat ricocheted around the silent hall. I must have opened the door and taken the telegram. I remember thinking how incongruous the colour was, yellow, hopeful, like pale spring sunshine. The boy didn't wait, knew no reply was needed. I shrank into a chair, frozen fingers struggling to open the envelope. "I deeply regret to inform you..."