

## **The US Marines and the Japanese Pilot.**

It had been the 29th January 1942 in Greymouth, with the war still in full swing, when George had arrived on Margaret's front doorstep, after 11 years of being apart. As a young child, Margaret's family had moved from America to Greymouth, New Zealand. George was Margaret's cousin and now he was here, standing on her doorstep, still waiting to be let in. He was standing close enough to touch. Should she dare reach out and touch the American Marine she had not seen for so long? The air had been so thick with anticipation, the sound of a pin drop could have been heard. To break the silence there was a cough, it was then Margaret had realized there were two other Marines standing beside George. She had recognised them almost instantly, it was Sam and Jock, George's best mates and her closest thing to brothers.

They had all together decided they had so much to catch up on and went out to the field for a picnic in the last of the sun's warm rays. The field had been filled with wheat only a week ago. Margaret had often found herself drifting to the window, where she would watch the tips of the wheat float aimlessly in the wind. Her mind miles away, back home in America where her heart truly belonged. Now she was here yet again but felt at peace with the world, for she had George her beloved cousin and all was well. This was not to last though.

Shortly after they had set up the picnic there was a whistling noise. They had all brushed it off as being the kettle on the stove top inside the house. Then the noise changed, it became a low rumble, it grew and grew until it became so loud it was almost deafening. They had the all stood, it was a plane. As soon as George saw the belly of the plane he knew it was no friend. The plane was scouting out the farm and surrounding area, this meant it was flying low. The plane flew over the straight line of pine and clipped the tops of the trees. The plane went spiralling towards the ground and crashed with a great, *BANG!*

Margaret, George, Sam and Jock had all been blown off their feet and landed in a great big heap. Once the dust and dirt had settled, they untangled themselves from each other and stood. In front of them had been one of the most horrific sights they had ever seen. The plane that had been flying lazily before now lay in a mangled lump, the pilot hanging out of the left-hand side, blood trickling down his right arm. Margaret was struggling to take it all in, she was unable to register that what she saw before her had been up in the air only minutes before. George feeling the distress radiating off Margaret gently took her hand and lead her back towards the house.

George, Sam and Jock then went over to the plane to investigate. What they had seen from the ground where they had landed was only half of the damage. The plane was just a munted, twisted lump of metal. You could no longer call it a plane. The pilot was badly wounded. They could see where his leg was trapped and how the metal was cutting into it. They could see where his head had hit the side of the plane on impact. The side of his head had blood flowing freely down the side. George, Sam and Jock all put their heads together and thought. They could hand the Japanese pilot into their commander and be treated like kings by the rest of the men in the region, where the Japanese man would be tortured within an inch of his life for information. Or they could help him to recover and then hand him over, or they could help him to recover and then send him back to Japan. They decided they would choose one of the last two options, they did have a conscience after all.

They then had to try and figure out how to get the pilot out of the plane while not injuring him more. Then there was the issue of where to put him while he was recovering. They got him out by gently lifting the metal that was stuck in his leg and staunching the blood flow with part of Jock's shirt. To remove the pilot from the plane they all together lifted him gently from the mess that was the plane. They then decided they would have to take him to the house, it wasn't ideal but it was either that or nothing. Once they got the pilot settled, George went to tell Margaret and her parents.

To say the least they didn't take it well. Margaret screamed at him to take the prisoner to the commander and let him do what may with the pilot. George could understand her anger, well after all, her younger brother William was away fighting in the Pacific. His Aunt Ellen broke down in tears and his Uncle Ben walked straight out of the room. George hurried after his Uncle, for he knew exactly where he would be going. Sure enough Uncle Ben stopped right outside of the spare room. "Now you look here *Boy*, these kind of men aren't friends. I don't know what they teach you in that fancy-pants school of yours but this man will not hesitate to kill us all while we sleep. He leaves now! Do you understand?" George was silent.

"I SAID DO YOU UNDERSTAND!" bellowed Uncle Ben.

What George said next was completely unexpected, not even George knew he was going to say it.

"I hate to have to do this Uncle but you leave me with no choice. I, George Smith, am a Corporal in the American Marines, I require your spare room, in which to help an injured Japanese man, so I can then interrogate him to find out why he is here. Do you have a problem with that Mr Smith?"

Uncle Ben was as purple as a prune, for he knew he was unable to question the orders of any military personnel above him.

"No, we don't *Corporal Smith*" came the snarky reply from Uncle Ben.

Around four weeks after this argument, the prisoner was a lot better and was able to move around freely again. The prisoner was able to speak fluent English and had told Margaret his name, Aki. He would only speak if Margaret was in the room. This was because he was unsure of the Marine's intentions. Aki spent a lot of time with Margaret while he was recovering, she was beginning to be quite fond of him. Aki was 23 years of age, the same as Margaret and the others. He also told them that he was American but had moved to Japan when his mother got a job as a journalist.

George and the others quickly befriended Aki, even Uncle Ben and Aunt Ellen. They also gave him a nickname, Rudder. Aki had received this when he was inspecting the plane they were repairing and had walked into the rudder, then fallen over across the rudder and slipped onto the ground. He then had come up flaming red. Aki was fitting in well, that was until the Sergeant Major came for a visit after receiving a tip off from an anonymous source.

"The source" the Sergeant said "has told me I will find something that shall delight me here. Do you, George happen to know anything about this?"

George then nudged Sam and inclined his head slightly towards Margaret. The movement was so well planned that the Sergeant Major didn't appear to notice it. George then replied with a simple "No Sir."

While they were discussing what the Sergeant had been told, Sam excused himself from the room to go to the bathroom. He did not however go to the bathroom but hurried quickly to the spare room to warn Margaret and Aki that they needed to get out of the house. Just before he entered the room he was hit over the head with something blunt. The swing was weak but enough to daze him.

Sam was then to learn Aki had been in the room next door to where the Sergeant Major and George were discussing the delightful tip off. He had then rushed back to warn Margaret. Together they devised a plan that they would sneak out the back door and try to get to the barn. From there Aki would then go into the hidden basement. After he had hidden, Margaret would rush back to the house, walk into the kitchen and serve the tea. This all went to custard when they heard footsteps approaching the room. Margaret grabbed the nearest hard item (it was a lamp) so when Sam pushed back the door she swung the lamp and hit him with what she thought was a strong swing. When he didn't fall, she had felt really annoyed. *Stupid head. Mustn't be much in it then* she had thought. It was only when Margaret heard the cry of "What the blazes was that for!" that she realized it was only Sam.

Back in the kitchen George was still trying to convince the Sergeant that there was no issue in the house. When the Sergeant insisted on a search of the house there had been nothing George could do to change his mind. All George could do next was hope Sam had got to Margaret in time.

Margaret had been listening to the last part of the conversation and rushed back to tell the others about the search of the house. They had then all ran to the barn where the plane was. Good thing George had found that the plane could be repaired. They had to find the fuel Jock had stolen from the Marines camp, it was easier said than done. It was hidden in the back of the basement, underneath the spare plough parts that had sat there 'since the dawn of time' according to Margaret's father anyway. After that they had to pull the plane out of the barn and onto the driveway. This would be the makeshift runway, it was not ideal but it would have to do. Just then they heard a shout.

"Get back here!" yelled the Sergeant Major. Margaret, Aki and Sam kept pushing and pulling the plane out onto the driveway, trying to get it straight. "STOP!" bellowed the Sergeant. They had almost got the plane in the right position. "AS A COMMANDING OFFICER I MUST ASK YOU TO STOP RIGHT NOW OR I *WILL* SHOOT!" The Sergeant in his haste to get to them, had tripped and triggered his gun by mistake, shooting himself in the leg. He screamed and yelled a stream of curse words. The plane was now in position. All they had to do now was get Aki in the plane. Just before he jumped into the plane, Margaret flew at Aki and threw her arms around him and cried, "I love you Aki, please come back to me alive, I beg of you"

She was in tears now, another gunshot was fired, this time it was on target...

Aki crumpled, screaming in agony, clutching his chest as he fell. Margaret fell forward, she grabbed Aki and pulled him close. The last words before he lost consciousness were "I love you too my *Hana*." Then everything went black for them both.

George launched himself at the Sergeant Major. He then tackled him to the ground and wrestled the gun from the Sergeant. The Sergeant swore as George hit his injured foot. With the gun in hand George yelled to Sam and Jock that they needed to wake Margaret and then get Aki to the coastline of Greymouth, where they would meet one of George's other friends who had a plane Aki could fly back to the United States. From there Aki would go and live with George's parents until the war had ended.

When Margaret came to, she was looking at three stoney faced men. Only two of them she recognised. There was Sam, with his dirty blonde hair, Jock with his raven black hair and another man. She sat up and studied the stranger, trying to think where she had seen him before. "Hi Margaret, I'm Ch-"

Before he could finish, it came to her, Margaret knew exactly who it was "Charles, from the book store?"

"Why yes it is me. I'm part of the Air Force, the ones who can't go to war." Charles told her. It was at that moment Margaret's memory came flooding back. Aki. She must see that Aki is alright. "Where is he?" she questioned the three boys. The boys all exchanged a glance. "Where is he?" she repeated more forcefully this time. Then as if by magic two arms wrapped around her. Two strong arms. Two arms she had come to know very well. It was Aki. She spun around with such force and so unexpectedly, Aki fell over backwards. "Aki!" she gasped. "You're here, really here, and alive!" All her words just tumbled out, it wasn't until a rough, warm finger was pressed to her lips that she stopped.

"I'm fine and a pretty good actor so it seems" Aki had replied to her babbling.

"You *what?*" Margaret screeched.

"Well, there's quite a story that goes with that, you see I had planned to give you something earlier today but was unable to when the Sergeant Major came calling."

"What was it?" Margaret questioned, now unsure.

"Now where would be the fun in that? As I was saying, when the bullet hit me the gift had been in the right place and prevented the bullet from entering my heart. The part about me falling and writhing in pain however was no acting because the force of the bullet still punctured my chest."

"Aki, you appear to be taking this all very well and I'm slightly concerned."

"Nothing could dampen my spirits on a day like today."

"Why is that my lovely Aki?" whispered Margaret, trying her best to be coy.

"Because" he said "you are about to make me the happiest man alive." He had said this as he rose to his feet, drawing her up with her hand.

Aki had then knelt down before her and pulled out a small metal box; it had a small bullet sized dent in the side of it, the ring inside was a stunning red ruby. *This must be the present he was talking about earlier*, Margaret thought.

"Will you, Margaret Smith, do me the honor in becoming my wife?"

"Well, I think there is only one answer to that, yes."

Aki then lept up and kissed her furiously. There was a small cough from behind the pair of them. It wasn't until that moment that Margaret realized the other boys were still there. She broke off the kiss, blushed and smiled sheepishly.

"Well, now all that mush is over and done with, do you think we can get back to the matter at hand? You know the one where Aki is considered an enemy pilot?" said Jock his voice dripping with sarcasm. This only made Margaret's blush darken.

"Right" With that they all followed Charles to where he had hidden his aircraft.

Aki kitted up with the pilot's gear inside, bid farewell to the boys and then turned to Margaret. His eyes had said all they needed to say. His mouth whispered "I love you" and his arms held her tight. All too soon it was time for him to go. He kissed Margaret quickly hopped in the plane and flew off. Margaret walked home in silence. She was numb and unfeeling. When she walked in the door she fell to the ground and felt the silent tears roll down her cheeks. When her mother came to the

door to collect the milk in the morning she found the crumpled sobbing mess that was her daughter.

“Oh Margaret” she had cried out “what is the matter now?” She then lifted Margaret onto her bed and gently sponged her face with a warm, damp cloth.

It took weeks for Margaret to get back on her feet. When she finally did all she could think of was her beloved Aki, away in a foreign country. She went about her chores on the farm as though in a dream. She was heart broken. She knew that he had to go but that didn't mean it didn't still hurt. Not even George could bring her out of her hollow state.

Four years after Aki had gone, the war had ended and Margaret had snapped out of her frozen state. George was sent back to America and her brother was still missing in action. When she allowed herself to think of Aki, she thought about when he had proposed to her, how they had both been over the moon and the happiest people on earth.

When Margaret woke the next morning she heard a loud rumbling. Margaret rushed to her window, like she was on winged feet. She then flung the window open and tried to see the plane. When she saw it her heart plummeted, it was only an American plane. There had been a fair few of these planes flying by during the week. No one knew why though. When the rumble started to grow, Margaret wandered onto the porch. Now she could see the plane properly, it was definitely American and coming towards the house. With a thump it landed on the flat tar near the wool shed. When the pilot and passenger got out, she had to grab onto the railing in front of her. It was Aki.

Once Margaret had got over the initial shock of seeing him she flew at him, wrapping his arms around his solid torso. “You're here!” she cried. This was when she had broken down and cried. “I thought you had forgotten me.” she said as she wept.

“I would never forget you my lovely Margaret” he had spoken into her shoulder. “I shall marry you tomorrow.” Margaret was so overcome with happiness at his words. The next day they were wed. Margaret had never felt more loved than when she spoke the words ‘I do’.



*The little town of Greymouth 1942.*

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