

The Nameless Soil of Loss

It was a summery day in the year 1942, as Eva pranced around her living room to the enchanting song 'Tangerine'. When the song came to a conclusion, she collapsed on a beige chair and gave a sigh of contentedness. She began to gather herself to go see her brother, she heard a breaking announcement on the family radio. A new initiative had been introduced. The new Manpower plan. It was made to sustain industry throughout the country. On the 11th of January, all women or girls who have children or are over the age of 16, would have to come to their local Appeals Board to be elected a job.

Eva was frightened. She never had to work before. She rushed to her mother to break the news. "Oh Mother!", She cried, "I bring terrible news! I will have to work somewhere far away from you and Father!", She wept. She had never been far away from her Ashburton household before. Her mother scampered over to her daughter and brought her into her warm embrace. Eva kept on crying until her eyes stung and they were a bright shade of red.

"Oh what shall I do? I will be so far away from Mother and Father!", She pondered as she wrapped her arms around her kneeling mother. As she collected herself up out of her sobbing state, she suddenly thought of her brother that she was to visit today. She pushed through her front door and began to bound down the street. She soon reached her older brother's house and she was not expecting to come through the door to find her brother collapsed on the floor in a vast pile of tears. She immediately rushed down to her brother's side. Mimicking her Mother, she threw her arms around him and cradled him close. After a few minutes of hugging, she built up the courage to ask why he was sobbing uncontrollably. "Charlie," She breathed, "Please, what has happened?" He looked up to reveal to Eva that he was holding a beige envelope. He held it up to her in a quivering hand and she didn't hesitate to take it from his grasp. As she slowly opened the letter, she dragged her hand over her mouth and returned to her brother's side.

After lamenting for quite some time, she collected herself for the second time today. She got up and made her brother some tea. Eva handed her brother the drink and he sat up and began to lean on Eva's shoulder.

"What am I to do?" He questioned his younger sister. She was very confused and extremely frustrated. She turned into a raging ball of lividness.

"Stupid Hitler and his brainless Nazi's!" She scolded.

"Why did Germany vote for him? All he would do is cause a big uproar and that is exactly what he has done! I wish he was never elected!" She burst out in acrimony. That night, she didn't get a blink of sleep.

Today was the day. The day she would be shipped away to live in a different town to work until Hitler was brought to a halt. She gave a huge sigh, how long would she be away from her family? Would they ever stop fighting in Europe? As she packed her bags, she got a surprise visit from the one she adored. As Charlie's daughter sprinted into her arms, she looked up to see a frowning brother. She freed Mary and then she was drawn into another hug by her brother. She could sense his tears trickling down his neck onto her shoulder, but she didn't care. She wanted this moment to last forever. When she was released from his grasp, she returned to her bedroom and placed the rest of her clothes and precious items into her bulging suitcases and dragged her feet out of her door. It was a short walk to the town centre but today it seemed like it was miles away. All she could think about was the burning questions that engulfed her mind.

She had reached the board in minutes and she was startled by how many young girls were wandering outside the establishment. She waited for a meagre 3 minutes before she was advised to take a seat. She had been dreading this moment. This was the time that she would be displaced to a foreign town and forced to work for hours. This to her was sheer horror. She sat and felt her skin crawl as she twisted and rolled in her seat. It was impossible to sit still. Her heart was pounding and she had her heart in her mouth. After relentless minutes of coiling in her chair, a masculine voice spoke her name. "Eva Janes" The voice stated. She rose without thinking twice.

"You will be a Land Girl. Go to the fifth meeting room and wait with your things. You will be shipped off at 12:00 pm. And do not be late!" The voice commanded. She quickly snatched up her cases and scrambled to the meeting room. It was several minutes before she saw a familiar face. It was her closest friend, Betty Sheridan. As soon as Betty recognised Eva, she rushed over and they immediately hit it off. With Betty there, it felt like it was only seconds before their train arrived. She cautiously climbed onto the train to find ripped leather seats belted together with tape. She went past multiple rows of seats before giving up and collapsing on a seat laminated in a thick layer of dust. She was joined by her friend again and she didn't say a word. Betty checked her temperature and asked her with great concern.

"Are you okay Eva? I can tell the driver to stop if you wish. Eva speak to me!"

All Eva could do was glance upwards. Her mind was troubled with fear. She felt slightly assured that she would be okay because Betty was here, but it would never be the same. Her mind was also warped with the fact that her brother may never return and he would leave his young daughter alone in this cruel world.

She arrived at her new destination in minutes. She was to work in the rural town of Methven. Eva had heard of the small oasis and she was surprised at the buzzing township that surrounded the petite community. She stepped down off the train to find six different farmers. This troubled Eva. A wider man walked forward and rested his hand on her shoulder. A tear drained from her eye. Charlie did this exact action to her all throughout her childhood. She glanced up to find herself staring into a scarred face. "My name is Allister Bractchett" He spoke. He had a gentle voice for the intimidating man that he was. "Eva" She stuttered "Eva Janes. So nice to...to meet you" She finally spat out. She glanced over her shoulder to see her friend being pushed in her direction. They got onto another train and they soon found themselves standing on a grand rural location. They stepped down and swivelled their heads to stare at large paddocks of crops and thousands of fluffy sheep. It looked like back-breaking work. She started to walk down the brown path to find herself staring at a long brick building. "You will be staying here," Allister announced. He backed away and left Eva to explore alone.

She stumbled into the cold building to find a nice kitchen and a huge lounge room. She started down the hallway to find about ten bedrooms with four bunk beds in each. She also noticed that each room had 8 names on the doors. She stared at each door before finding her name. She walked in and found there were two young women engaged in conversation. They began to quiet down when they noticed Eva's arrival. She quickly placed her cases on the floor and she was about to bolt until one of the girls piped up.

"You must be Eva Janes, right?" She questioned. Eva swivelled around to see a young girl with bright blonde hair and the deepest of brown eyes.

"I am Georgia Skycral. Nice to meet you. Oh, this is Charlotte Barine. She's very shy." Georgia stated. Eva just stared until she realised they were patiently awaiting her reply.

"Oh," She blurted "I'm Eva, Yes" She confirmed. She took a seat on a pale blue bed and began to talk to the girls.

Hours had passed before they fell asleep.

"Maybe this won't be so bad," Eva thought as she drifted off to slumber. The next day arrived in the blink of an eye. Eva woke with a start. She clambered out of bed and drifted out to the kitchen to be reunited with the girls she would be living with for however long this war lasts. She met with Georgia and Charlotte and they began to engage in conversation. They didn't have long before Allister bounded through the door and gave each girl a set of deep evergreen overalls. Eva glanced blankly at the clothing piece.

"Are we to wear these?" She questioned Mr Bractchett.

"Do you want to get soaked in muddy water?" He replied. For the gentleman he was, he seemed very upset. Eva walked down the hallway in disgust. She held the accessory as far away from her as possible. She chucked on her overalls and headed towards the door.

She walked out of the front door to find it was raining.

"Great," She said, blandly "A rainy day is just what we need to get us started," She stated. She looked up to see Georgia looking ecstatic and practically bouncing on the spot. She looked over to Charlotte to see her face was hanging low so nobody could see her features. They all came to a halt when they saw Allister striding their way. When he reached the girls he had glided his eyes over all their heads. He then announced his plan.

"You will work in groups," He exclaimed "You will have to work as a team to complete your daily tasks," He continued. He went on to group each of the girls. To her surprise, she was put with Georgia and Betty. They soon found out that they were to learn how to shear sheep, drive tractors, harvest crops, ride horses and a whole lot more. They began to wander down the path to a wooden shed to learn how to shear sheep. Eva went into the shed to find hundreds of white sheep staring at her as she walked past. She watched as the tutor grabbed a sheep and began to run the blade down its skin. She did the same on her sheep and he was very impressed with her ability to shear a sheep.

As dusk began to start, she began to walk towards her new inhabitation to see they had a mailbox. She saw a few letters sticking out of the front. She walked out to the mailbox and collected the letters. She soon noticed that one was addressed to her. She immediately tore it open and recognised the written handwriting. It was Charlie's. She skimmed through the letter and she read with interest that Charlie explained that the war made him feel excited and young. She was very scared. This was not the Charlie that she grew up with. The Charlie she knew hated violence and was frightened at the fact that anyone was fighting. Ignoring the change in personality, she was happy that he was safe and healthy.

It had been a week and she had received regular letters from Charlie. Since she arrived, she had learned to shear sheep, harvest crops, drive tractors, ride horses and lots more. After spending a week here, she had grown to love the countryside. Its vast landscapes and natural coloured crops calmed Eva's soul. This evening she decided to write to Charlie. She wrote down a deep description of the farm she was staying on and how she was working every hour of every day. She finished the letter in minutes and she felt content. She grabbed an envelope and sealed the letter in tight. She trotted out to the mailbox and placed the letter in. She lifted the red arrow to signal that there was mail in the box.

She skipped down the driveway and jumped through the front door. She sat on a wooden seat and began to babble away to Georgia. While she was talking, she stuffed her face with beans, carrots, gravy and a sliver of fish. She felt as if she was at home. The warm environment and friendly faces all brought her back to Ashburton. She walked down the hall to hear a soft sobbing. Eva pushed back the door to see her friend draped on her bed and crying into a pillow. Eva tip-toed to Betty's side and gave her a tight squeeze. She was upset to see Betty in this state so she wanted to know the reason why.

"Betty," She whispered, "What happened to you?" She inquired with a voice coated with sympathy. Betty glanced up at Eva and mumbled through her sobs of sadness

"Edward has been killed"

Eva had been taken back. Edward was Betty's twin and he was shipped off to war. Eva came over to her dear friend and cradled her close. This news brought fear into Eva's heart. All it did was make her think of poor Charlie.

That night Eva didn't sleep. Her mind was spinning in a vortex and she couldn't stop thinking about poor Charlie. All she could do was think about all the ways he could be killed. Murdered, stabbed, shot, tortured? These thoughts roamed her mind all night.

The next morning seemed to arrive hours later than it should've. She pulled back the covers and dragged her legs to the side of her bed. She stood up and tugged her arms to the ceiling. She sauntered down the hallway and peered up to see that everyone was bringing Betty into their embrace. Eva felt envious. Betty was her best friend not everyone else's. She brushed off her envy and wandered into the kitchen to make breakfast. She toasted some bread and layered butter on top. She sat down and enjoyed her humble meal. After finishing her breakfast, Eva paced down the hallway to get prepared for the harsh day ahead of her. She heaved on some old clothes and tossed her overalls on top. She tied her red hair back into a messy bud and went to go complete the rest of her morning routine.

She lept out of her room and roamed down the hall. She paced down the hallway and sprung out of the front door to chuck her gumboots on and head towards the horse stable. Once she arrived, she found the indecent plough. She took two Clydesdales named Avery and Jesse and got them attached to the plough and began to walk to the paddock that needed to be done. This task alone would take several days. She trotted the horses over to the yard and began her day's work. Hours had past and she was only a quarter of the way through. She sighed. She was reflecting on her home. Her compassionate Mother, her darling Father and of course all her 6 siblings, especially miserable Charlie.

Weeks had past and she had finally completed the paddock. She rewarded the horses with a carrot each and a good cuddle. She wandered back to the house to see a small letter addressed to her on the kitchen table. She cautiously took the letter in her grasp. She noticed the handwriting in seconds. It was her Mother's. She saw that the letter was designed with small drops of clear liquid.

"This can't be good," She told herself as she peeled the opening of the letter. She drew the letter out of its case and began to read.

"Dear Eva," It began

"I am writing to tell you out of pure grief that your brother..." It was very hard to read. It was a thick coating of black ink over the words she was wanting to read. She was beginning to hate censorship.

"Has sadly passed" It spoke.

Eva couldn't read any more. She was collapsed on the floor with tears flooding her eyes and dribbling onto the floor. She cried for ages and she just couldn't stop. As all the girls walked in, they all came and rushed to her side. She felt supported, yet hollow as if she was nothing but thin air. She watched as all the girls read the letter and saw their sadness become their facial expression. When Betty came in, She snagged the letter from someone's hand and began to sob uncontrollably and came and fell next to Eva.

As dusk began to break, Eva was still crying. The thought of her brother gone seemed ridiculous. Yet it was no dream, only reality. She sat on her bed and began to read the rest of the letter.

"We are very upset that you are not here and grieving with us. We have arranged to have a memorial for your dear brother.

We hope that you may join us soon," Eva couldn't read the lists of names because of another thick layer of ink had been spread across. Eva didn't mind because she knew the names of her family members. She could feel each fragment of her shattered heart stab her inside with sorrow as she reread her Mother's letter over and over again.

As she read the letter, she understood that she would have to inform Mr Brattchet that she was requesting to go home to mourn over her dear brother. But what would he say? Would he let Eva go or would he force her to stay? She had to gather up a lot of courage to go tell him the painful news of her dearly departed Charlie but, she was fretting his response. Even though she was very frightened, there was a small hope that was bubbling up inside of her that made her feel like she could do anything. She was beginning to believe that Charlie never left. He was always going to be with her. She trudged down the beige path to the large wooden house that was the residence of Allister Brattchet. She arrived at the timber household and knocked clamorously at their main door. A very plump woman with blonde hair edged with silver wandered to answer the door.

"Hello there dearie" She cooed.

"Hi." She responded "I am a land girl that has been employed on your farm. I was hoping to speak with Allister if he's home," She replied nicely.

"I'm so sorry sweetheart, He's away looking at the latest machinery. Please, come in and talk to me. If you like I will pass on our talk to Allister? But only if you are comfortable" She responded.

Eva gracefully stepped inside to find herself walking into a wall of hot air. She followed Allister's wife into the lounge room and took a seat on a shimmering leather chair. She waited a while as his wife made a cup of tea and a plate of cookies. She watched as she roamed into the room and take a seat across from her.

"However rude of me" she exclaimed. "I am Mary. Mary Brattchet," She commented.

"Eva," She responded "Eva Janes,"

"So Eva," She began "Tell me what happened."

Eva didn't wait to tell her tragic story. She went on to explain how she had to leave her home for the first time and how she had to learn to do everything because she had never worked on a farm before. The more Eva told, the sadder Mary seemed to get. She had seen as Mary's emotional wall began to break and watched as each tear slipped from her lime-green eyes.

When Eva finished she got told to come over to sit next to Mary. She glided over to the great leather couch and she rested down next to Mary. Mary took her hands in hers and began to speak ever so softly.

"Eva, you listen to me. You go back to the house and you go rest. I will inform Allister and you will go home. I promise" She breathed.

Eva quickly sat up and thanked Mrs Brattchet for listening to her and she raced off to the house. She was bursting with joy and she couldn't wait to be reunited with her family. Even though she was to see her family again, she wanted to reunite over a happy thing as the war ending or Charlie coming home alive, not dead. It suddenly hit her. How would she tell Georgia and Betty?

Should she tell them she's leaving? Or just leave them behind?

She realised she'd have to tell the truth.

As the girls walked in from a long day of working, Eva signalled Georgia and Betty over.

"I don't know how to tell you this..." She began "I have to go home. I'm so sorry" She remarked. She clenched her eyes shut and she was expecting to be yelled at but instead, she felt two warm bodies being held against hers. She relaxed her eyes and the two girls took her to her bedroom. She gathered her clothes and belongings packed them away in her brown cases. She gave out a bitter sigh. She had grown so custom to the country landscape and the feel of the rough life as a farmer. She climbed on her bed and snapped her eyes shut. She drifted off to sleep to be awakened by a rough shaking of her shoulder. She rolled over to find herself staring into Allister's intense eyes. They soon softened as he realised he had her attention.

"I'm sorry for your loss," He whispered

"It's fine. I am to go home tomorrow?" She questioned.

"You may leave," He responded. Eva lay on her bed and pondered about tomorrow. She eventually befell to sleep and dreamed of tomorrow.

Eva's awoke to a start to hear a loud fist pounding against her door. She opened it to see Allister waiting at the door for her. He told her to get dressed and to meet him outside at 10.00 am. She paced off back into her bedroom and chucked on a white dress spotted with roses and went to the bathroom to complete her routine. Minutes had passed and she was ready to go home. She walked out of the room to find all of the other land girls waving her goodbye and bringing her into endless clinches. She subsequently made her way out of the building and began to walk down to meet Allister. He sent her off on to the train that ran past their house and she climbed on. She waved him goodbye and took a seat next to a window on the left. She glanced out longingly. She wished that none of this had happened and she was still working on the land.

She had arrived in her home town Ashburton and her mood brightened up immensely. She descended off the platform to be tugged into a cuddle by her Mother, Father and her now 5 siblings. She was released and she felt like she had never left. She was walked back to their historic brick house and sprinted into her bedroom. She had missed its familiar walls. She walked back out to see her family mourning over their major loss. She glided over to their side and joined them. Then, she was taken outside to be shocked by seeing a silver tombstone with Charlie's name imprinted into the granite. She jogged down and began to sob and knelt down to be with the stone.

The next evening, she wandered outside to visit Charlie's grave. She had sworn she had seen his familiar silhouette leaning against it. She felt happy and warm inside. Even though Charlie had left the family, he would never leave her. She glanced off into the sunset and watched the sun fade away. He was gone but never forgotten.



This is a picture of some land girls holding triplet lambs in 1943.

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