

The Objector's Daughter

Today was the dreaded day. The day that would forever change the life of Janet Frazing; an innocent 13-year-old girl. Today was the 17 September 1942. Janet had been pushing the nerve-wracking event out of her mind, but she could no longer prevent terrible thoughts from flooding through her. For today was no ordinary summer day in the little town of Bluff - at least not from the perspective of this terrified individual. Today the girl's beloved Papa would plead in front of the New Zealand Appeals Board as a conscientious objector.

Four days ago, the aforesaid Father had come home from his job at the local vegetable store - a humble but enjoyable occupation. Janet was reading by the fire when he slumped through the door and sagged into a chair without even removing his coat or boots. The 32-year-old man seemed awfully distracted. He was wearing a miserable expression and a faraway look that Janet didn't recall ever seeing on his usually cheerful face. When she timidly squeaked his name, he jumped as though not having registered that she was in the room.

"Papa, is something wrong?" she inquired.
"What?" he replied, seeming dazed. "No...no of course not my darl-" he couldn't finish, for tears were spilling silently down his cheeks. For the first time, Janet's gallant Papa was crying, and she had no idea what to do. At that moment, the Mother of the anxious girl stepped into the room smelling of pastry. She began talking of dinner, but came to a sudden halt after she caught sight of the scene in front of her. Janet's Papa held up a newspaper, and the questioning look on her Mama's face changed to one of hopeless despondency, suggesting she knew what the paper contained.

"You've...been...conscripted," she could no longer choke back her tears. She rushed to her husband and embraced him, shaking. Janet stayed where she was, utterly shocked. "No!" She said. "I don't believe it! I won't believe it!" She began to sob uncontrollably, and collapsed to the floor at her parents' feet. Billy (Janet's younger brother of 8) came into the dining room to see what on earth the fuss was about. When told the devastating news, he too burst into floods of tears (this was unusual, as he normally tried to act like a man). There they were: clasping each other - one big, weeping, family sandwich, unwilling to let their dear Father and husband go.

The next day, Janet's Papa confessed his plan to the rest of the family. He could never kill, nor take orders from those encouraging murder. So he would go in front of the Appeals Board and beg to stay home due to his religion. Nobody seemed content with this idea, fearing what would happen if the Appeals Board refused. However, there seemed few other options. Eatables were packed in a basket and the group boarded a train. Janet sat next to her Papa, taking him in for what might well be the last time. She clasped his hand; it was clammy. The train rocked her to sleep, her head drooping on his shoulder.

"Janet, we are here." She was being shaken awake, and saw the distraught face of her Mama. She rose, stretched and felt butterflies flutter madly around in her abdomen. Together, the family stepped out of the train and into the sunlight. *Such a beautiful day*

thought Janet. *This stupid war spoils everything. I could have been having such fun on this fine Sunday.*

The waiting room was so quiet, you could have heard a pin drop. A few couples and individuals were there, their forlorn faces reflecting how the family of four felt. Janet sat, quaking, waiting in petrified silence. At long last, her Papa's name was called. He stood, aimed a weak smile at his family and followed a strict-looking man through a heavy wooden door. The young girl watched him go through bloodshot eyes, feeling faint. Suddenly, the bitter truth seemed to crash over her like an icy wave. Thoughts of terrible things happening to her beloved Father made her head spin. She clutched the edge of her chair and whimpered. Her Mama noticed this, and pulled her close.

Janet did not know how long she sat there - it could have been five minutes or two hours. All she knew was that she wanted her Papa to step happily into the dreary room and reassure his family that everything was alright. At long last, dragging footsteps could be heard, and a man walked through the door. Janet barely recognised him. His face was grave and tear stained. Surely this disconsolate being couldn't possibly be her Papa? Only when he walked towards her did she realise the horrendous truth. It was him.

"I'm going to a detention camp," he mumbled "I have two minutes to say goodbye to you."

"Oh, Thomas, no!" wailed Mama.

"Oh, Papa, it's not fair!" cried Billy.

"Oh, Papa!" Janet exclaimed, unable to say anything else. She embraced him, willing this to be nothing but a bad dream, though she could taste the salty tears trickling onto her lips. Her Mama and brother joined them, and they held each other tightly. Mama pushed food from the picnic basket into her husband's hands.

"I love you all so much," said Papa "and I will try to be brave and make you proud. I truly want to stay with you, but they have made their decision and are incorrigible. Please don't think of me as a coward. God would never want me to kill, so I shan't."

"You are **not** a coward" said Mama. "You are incredibly brave. We will-" but she did not have time to finish her sentence, for Papa was being pulled from his family by two guards.

"I love you!" he shouted, before being dragged through the wooden door and out of sight. Janet screamed for him, but it was no use. He was gone.

Janet sat solemnly on her bed. She had no tears left to spill, as she had cried her hurting heart out the whole of the train journey back. Instead she felt an aching loneliness, like a thirst that could never be quenched. She flopped back and let her thoughts pull her into sleep. She dreamed of Papa, and everything they had done together; flying kites, running across a sandy beach, making snow angels. When she awoke, fresh tears spurted out of her puffy eyes as she longed to go back into her dream. Would she ever see her Father again?

The next week proved to be incredibly difficult for the family. The news that Janet's Papa had been imprisoned as a conscientious objector had spread like wildfire. Everywhere she went, she was thrown looks of disgust. Her Mama had to find a job now that she had no

husband to provide for the family, but no-one would employ her. When Janet and Billy were sent to the dairy to fetch milk, the woman behind the counter refused to serve them. Even Janet's closest friend acted strangely around her, as if they hardly knew each other. Janet was puzzled. Why was she being punished for her Papa's choices? It made no sense.

That Friday was one Janet never forgot. It was break-time at the school she and Billy went to. She was simply wandering around, minding her own business, when she heard a nasty voice.

"Oi! Janet! Your Daddy is a conchie coward!" Patrick, the school bully who was a year older than Janet, was making fun of her Papa! "Your good-for-nothing Father is a coward!" he repeated, smirking. Janet started to walk away, seething with fury, but Patrick and his cronies cornered her.

"Your precious Daddy is a disgusting traitor. He just hasn't got the guts to protect us!" Janet couldn't stand hearing the bully speak about her Papa in that fashion. She lunged at him and punched him straight in the nose, anger taking over her self-possession.

Before she knew what was happening, she was being dragged away by the strict Head Teacher, Miss Argott. Janet did not feel any guilt when she glanced back at the shocked, bloodied face of her victim. Throwing her into an empty classroom, Miss Argott brandished a sharp ruler and thwacked Janet repeatedly over the knuckles.

"How dare you behave in this manner!" The teacher screeched. "Attacking a fellow student! Woe betide when you Mother finds out about this, young lady!"

Janet was sent home in disgrace, with a note explaining what she had done. Her Mama was certainly very outraged, until the girl repeated what Patrick had said.

"What a horrid boy," gasped Mama "I must admit, I would have struck him too. I hate the idea of killing, but I am beginning to wish your Father had gone to fight after all. It would have saved us a heap of trouble. I am yet to find employment, and white feathers are piling up on our doorstep."

Janet strongly disagreed with her Mother. She was so proud of her brave Papa, and did not want him to give in and join the Armed Forces.

A few days later, a letter came from Papa. It read:

My Dearest Marilyn, Janet and Billy,

I think of you every second. I am in a Detention Camp. I am not allowed to tell you where it is. I pester the guards and spout passages from the Bible whenever I can, which irritates them. I am well, though the work here is hard. Please do not worry about me. I hope you do not think badly of me, and are faring well. We will be together again soon, I promise.

After that, all you could see was blue lines. Janet stared at them in disgust. Someone had clearly already read their 'private' mail. Though soothed that her Father was alright, she kept thinking about the hard labour he was being forced to do. She wanted to take his advice and not worry, but that seemed impossible.

All letters from Papa were the same. He said he was coping fine, and that as far as he knew he was the only man from Bluff in the camp. He told the family that he thought of them often, and that they were not to worry. The letters constantly had parts cut out or

scribbled over. This was disconcerting, and Janet could not help but wonder why he could not tell them certain things.

Thomas Frazing was sorely missed. Though most of the townspeople thought he should be a brave soldier, they secretly admired his courage. Most knew of the hardship he was suffering. In his last letter, he had stated that digging up stones in a quarry had badly damaged his back, and that he was constantly beaten for reciting the Bible or refusing military orders. A lot of people in Bluff pitied him, especially as he was the much-loved town handyman, always willing to help. But however much the locals missed him, his family missed him more. Janet could never be happy without him, and was lost in a world of despair. She had to do something, but what?

One windy day, months after Papa had been imprisoned, Janet was walking the beach, her mousy hair blowing around her face, when she spotted the building of the Bluff Council. *That's it!* She thought. *I'll start a protest!* She rounded up a large group of Bluff citizens - mostly women and elderly men - and called them to her family's house.

"Listen here!" she ordered. "My Papa is being punished for refusing to be a murderer. He was kind and caring towards every single person in this room, and we need to show him we appreciate that. He is suffering terribly because of his beliefs, which is a great injustice. We have to do something. We have to protest."

"But we are powerless!" said an old man. "We would simply be brushed aside."

"No, we wouldn't," Janet insisted. "If we persisted and didn't give up, they would have to give him back to us. Please. I can't live happily without my Papa. Isn't it at least worth a try?"

There was a deafening silence, as all contemplated this statement. Then, one by one, everyone nodded in agreement.

"Good," Janet said, pleased with this newfound achievement. "We shall start collecting support tomorrow."

Posters. Brochures. Petitions. Marches. Janet's bright mind was whirling with ideas. Mama had been so proud when Janet announced that she had willing supporters. However, this happiness was not to last. The little girl's life would change forever when a horse-drawn carriage pulled up outside.

Only very important people have such transport thought Janet, intrigued. *This must be important.* A short, plump man, flanked by two guards, rapped on the door.

"Yes?" Mama inquired, slightly bewildered by this scene. "Can I help you?" The man removed his top hat, looking pitiful.

"Mrs Frazing? My name is Mr Cornwell. I am a representative of the New Zealand Appeals Board. It is your husband, Ma'am. He has been wounded and infected. He is...he is dying, Ma'am. I'm so sorry." Mama gasped and clutched her breaking heart. She grabbed at the door to steady herself. Janet sat still. This man was a liar. Her Papa couldn't possibly be dying. He just couldn't. But when she looked at her Mother's eyes, the icy truth hit her. She screamed, as she was carried away by a wave of misery. She was sinking...caught in the undertow...drowning. Janet screeched and screeched. Her Mama ran to her and engrossed

her, both of them wanting this to be a nightmare. Mr Cornwell stood awkwardly on the doorstep, observing this terrible sight.

“Thomas?” It was Mama who spoke. The family had travelled in the horse-drawn cart, their hearts ripping. Billy had been traumatised when he too learned the terrible news. They were to see their beloved family member one last time. He had been defending a young man in the hands of an angry guard, and was beaten savagely. His wounds had become infected (of course, it didn’t help that he was weak from hunger and being overworked) and now he was dying from bacteria. He lay in a bleak room of the camp hospital, sleeping. His eyes fluttered open at the sound of his wife’s voice. He was pale, but he managed a small smile when he saw the people closest to his heart.

“Oh, Papa, what have they done to you?” Janet whispered. Papa held out his arms. Both Billy and Janet ran to him. They sobbed into him fiercely, longing for this moment to live forever. Mama kissed her husband on the cheek and grasped his hand.

“Hello, my dears,” he said in a rasping tone. “I’m alright, I just look rather frightful.”

“I miss you so, Papa,” wept Billy. “Please don’t leave me.”

“I must,” said Papa, sighing. He started to cough violently. Mama patted him on the back and trickled water into his mouth. He looked ashamed when he saw the alarmed faces of his children.

“Sorry to frighten you,” he said. “So tell me, what has been happening at home? The family talked for hours. Janet told Papa about how she had punched the school bully, and he chuckled obligingly. Then, quite suddenly, he lay back on his pillows, out of breath.

“Are you alright, Thomas?” Mama sounded worried.

“Oh, my darlings, I think my time has come,” he replied, quite calm. Every individual in that room began to weep. Janet held her Father’s hand tightly.

“I love you all, and I am so proud of the people you have become,” he murmured, his breathing unsteady.

“Don’t go, Papa,” whispered Janet.

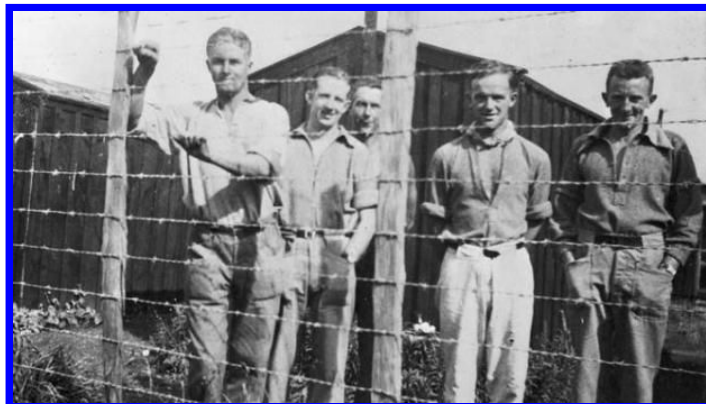
“Always believe in yourselves. Never give up.” Papa spoke firmly in spite of himself. “I love you so much, and don’t you ever forget that.” Janet, Billy and Mama sobbed hysterically.

“Goodbye,” breathed Papa. He closed his eyes, his hand slackening in Janet’s grip. He exhaled one last time. The world around him seemed to stand still. Opening his arms to God, he peacefully slipped away, surrounded by his loved ones, the hint of a smile haunting his face.

The family were stunned. They could not accept what had just happened. It didn’t make sense. Yet there he was, lying dead in a bed that wasn’t his. Janet couldn’t understand. He was her Papa; he was supposed to always be there. She could not bring herself to look at her face. Mama let out a groan, and began to weep in a most unladylike fashion. Still, Janet didn’t cry. Billy buried his face in his hands, but the small girl could not shed a tear. She simply felt an agonising pain in her chest. She thought about her Papa’s dying speech. *I am so proud of you*, he had said. *I love you*. Finally, the tears began to flood out of her young eyes. She poured her heart onto a handkerchief.

For the rest of the war, Janet and her family fought for the rights of conscientious objectors. They could not bear the thought of other families suffering similar hardships. The people of Bluff were outraged when they found out that their beloved Thomas had been so cruelly snatched from the Earth. Petitions many metres long were created, brochures were scattered in the streets of New Zealand, marches to the Bluff Council were performed. Everyone who had planned to campaign to get Janet's Papa out of the camp now wanted to avenge him. Thomas Frazing was an inspiration to all. He had not given in: he had stood up for what he believed in, and many followed in his footsteps. He had been buried in the local graveyard, and his headstone was almost drowning in flowers. Janet was a frequent visitor, and weaved visiting her Father into her daily routine. Grief had turned to determination, and she was passionate about her cause.

One sunny day, Janet was kneeling by her Papa's handsome stone grave. She felt oddly restless, as if she had to resolve something right that minute. "I will never give up, Papa," she said, as if she were reassuring his spirit. "You always have been, and always will be, my greatest inspiration. I *will* finish what you started, I promise. I'll be strong; I will make you proud." It might have just been the mysterious summer breeze, but Janet could have sworn she heard a voice whispering soothingly to her: "I am already proud, my darling girl."



This image was taken in 1943. It shows conscientious objectors in the Hautu Detention Camp.

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