

A Moment in Time

The woman walked slowly, carefully supporting the arm of the old lady who shuffled along the street. Slowly, tired watery eyes focused upon the clock tower and tried to read the time upon its tip.

“Come on Mum,” said the younger woman as they stood in the middle of the road. “We can’t stand here all day. Mum....?”

* * * *

Maggie glanced at her watch for the third time in 10 minutes.

“Oh please don’t let me down! You promised you’d be here. Where are you?” She asked aloud. The cool night was filled with the hubbub from the blacked out public house standing near the circular clock house in which she waited patiently.

The second hand picked it’s way around its course, as it reached the six the young woman commenced a whispered countdown.

“29, 28, 27....” When she reached 10, her words were echoed by the merrymakers in the Red Lion.

“Nine, eight, seven....” They said in unison. “.... Three, two, one copper happy New Year!!” A burst of noise from the inn assaulted the air as people cheered and sang. Maggie looked up sadly to the bright full moon trying desperately not to cry as the clock above her head struck 12 times to welcome 1941.

“You missed it!” She cried to the moonlit night. A melancholy air descended upon her as the sound of the enjoyment drifted across the street. This would be the first new year she had ever spent apart from her twin brother if he didn’t show up. His unit was only based in Guildford and he promised he would make it for the stroke of midnight. Suddenly her ears became aware of another sound, quiet at first but growing louder. Holding her breath she anticipated the warning. None came. By now she was panicking, looking anxiously up and down the street only to find that she was all alone. The drone, loud now, tore through her as she stood rooted to the spot looking to the sky in time to see birdlike shapes silhouetted against the moon.

At last the banshee wailing of the sirens rent the night bringing people rushing out onto the street from all directions. But still Maggie stood firm until a young soldier saw her

standing in the shadows, laid an arm around her shoulder and led her toward the shelter. Immediately she felt safe as his strong arms guided her. Crackling flak lit up the sky above their heads as the planes drew closer. Inclining her head she looked into his illuminated face, bright chalk blue orbs that shone like beacons beamed back at her and a tingle shot down her spine as she gazed into the handsome face. He turned to her and smiled.

They heard the frightful whistling before they had crossed the street and instinctively broke into a run as the high-pitched noise got nearer. The blast sent them both flying as pieces of broken glass and stone flew through the air as the bomb exploded. Darkness closed in around Maggie, the last thing she saw was two fulgent blue eyes that were firmly inscribed upon her mind....

Maggie opened her eyes; the light greeted her with an intense stabbing pain throbbing between her temples and she quickly closed her heavy lids. Moments later she tried again, this time the hazy features of a man swam before her. Instantly she recollected the stranger, but as she strained her eyes in order to focus upon the face she realised that it wasn't him.

"What happened to you?" She managed quietly when she recognised the young man.

"Sorry sis', I was only a couple of minutes late, but by then...." His voice faded to silence. "How do you feel?"

"Not so good, my head is killing me," she replied to her brother, glancing around the hospital ward.

"I'm not surprised," stated Terry. "That was a close call. You're very lucky."

"What about the man that helped me, was he all right?" Even as she mentioned him her heart skipped a beat.

"Man? I never saw no man. I heard the blast in the next street and I ran as fast as I could, I guess it must have landed somewhere near the clock tower. By the time I got there you were lying in the middle of the street." He paused for breath. "But I never saw no man, he must have bought it...."

Maggie didn't hear his words, she was in a world of her own. A world full of a stranger's kind face.

1941 was a few days old by the time Maggie was back on her feet. Wrapped up firmly in her dressing gown she walked around the long corridors gradually working her

way round the wards. Carefully she looked at each face in every bed, hoping to catch a glimpse of her mysterious hero.

'What happened to him?' she thought desperately as she lay awake at night.' Was he all right?'

Soon Maggie was fit enough to leave hospital and with it came the feeling that the stranger was gone forever. Sadly there was no one to collect her on this cold frosty January morning, Terry was back with his unit, her father was overseas and her mother would be at work in the factory.

For Maggie the street was a rumbustious mix of vehicles and people who wove erratic paths through the throng. Standing there, amid hundreds of fellow Londoners, she couldn't understand the air of depression that hung about her.

'Why do I feel so alone?' she thought as a tear threatened to spill down her cold red cheeks. Shrugging her shoulders she made her way to the wide bridge that traversed a grey looking Thames and joined the queue of people waiting for the bus.

It was with a sense of relief that Maggie caught a glimpse of the bright red roof of the bus and soon she was sitting smugly in the warmth, watching a shivering London pass before her eyes.

Then she saw him standing there at the side of the road. For the briefest of moments their eyes met and he smiled in recognition as Maggie craned her neck to keep sight of him as the bus sped on. It took a couple of seconds to pull herself together.

"He's all right!" She exclaimed as she leapt to her feet and ran to the rear of the bus, pulling the bell-cord incessantly.

"All right, all right, 'old yer 'orses," shouted the conductor. "What's yer 'urry."

"Oh I'm sorry, I've got to get off quick. Please hurry!" She pleaded. The conductor considered her for what seemed to Maggie to be an age before finally giving two sharp tugs on the cord and the driver, recognizing the signal, instantly pulled over to the side of the road.

"'Ere 'old on," shouted the conductor as Maggie jumped to the pavement. "You 'aven't paid." Anxiously she fumbled around inside her pockets, she had no money! Dolefully she looked up at the conductor indicating that she had nothing to give him. He looked down at the pretty young girl, smiled, winked, gave two swift tugs on the cord and the bus pulled away quickly.

Maggie ran her heart out, dodging the oncoming crowd, retracing the route of the bus. Rain was beginning to fall as long strides carried her swiftly to the place where she had caught sight of the handsome stranger. Stopping dead in her tracks she came to the

spot where he had been standing. He was gone. Letting the winter downpour soak her to the skin, Maggie stared forlornly at the empty pavement. The rain rain down her face, mingling with the tears as she realised that the chance of meeting the man who had saved her life was seemingly gone forever.

Suddenly she felt a warm arm enclose around her shoulder as an umbrella was placed above her head. Spinning round she looked directly into the blue eyes she remembered so well from just a few days ago.

“This is no time for a lady to be out alone,” he said in mock reprove. “Can I offer you a coffee?” Maggie’s words stuck in her throat and she barely managed a nod as once again she felt the warmth of protection embrace her as he led her out of the rain....

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“Mum!” Shouted the daughter as car horns blew loudly either side of them. Maggie jumped and wrenched her eyes from the clock tower that had brought memories of New Years Eve 1940 flooding back to her.

“What’s wrong Mum? We can’t stop here.” Maggie looked into her daughter’s chalk blue eyes, eyes she had known and loved since that fateful December night.

“Thank God for Hitler and his bombs, we owe him a hell of a lot you know, if it wasn’t for them....” Her daughter looked at her and sighed sadly at the symptoms of old age.

‘She’s never been the same since Dad died,’ she thought as she finally escorted her from the middle of the road.

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