

## The Milkman

It had been a long night at the end of another long week. The sirens had been on more than they had been off and the southern horizon appeared to be constantly welcoming the rising sun: the fires blazed, and London burned.

"When will it ever end, Fred?"

"I've told you before, Mabel; it'll end when those buggers stop dropping their flaming bombs and nae a moment sooner."

"And when will that be, Fred?"

"Who knows, hen, who knows? Here, tae your tea, then try to get some sleep."

Fred added a splash of milk and a half teaspoon of sugar, then handed the cup and saucer to his wife.

"Ta Fred. Where would I be without you?"

"And y'can have my ration, love. I'm sweet enough without."

"Well, you *are* a sweetie! And where would we be without you brave milkmen? Out in all weathers, picking your way through the rubble. I don't know."

"Och, it's nothing, hen, and we've all got tae do our bit."

Outside, the distant rumbling rolled north to Fred and Mabel's Barnet semi. Fred lifted the blind a half-inch and peered through the blackness, five or six miles to the East End and the London Docks.

"They're really copping it tonight, poor blighters." He turned and shook his head sadly. "Just thank the Lord we're here, and not there."

Mabel sipped her tea and placed it on the bedside table, then took a deep breath before speaking.

"And what about your family, Fred? They're not too far from Glasgow, you say?"

Fred fixed her with an icy stare and put his cup down hard, tea slopping into the saucer.

"What have I told you? I've nothing to do with them now, and I haven't heard a bliddy peep from them since afore the war! They kicked me oot, so that's it as far as I'm concerned. I dinnae wanna know!"

"I'm sorry Fred, it's just that I worry-"

"Aye. Well. There's no need to, not on my behalf at least. You stay here. I'm just going to check on the shelter," he said curtly, slamming the bedroom door.

The sound of bombing intensified and over London searchlights formed a silver lattice as they scanned the pitch-black dome of the sky. As the minutes passed, Mabel slipped further down the bed, finally pulling the pink candlewick cover over her head.

"I'm frightened, Fred," she whispered into the void, "I'm frightened..."

The door of the shelter creaks open, and Mabel appears, her dressing gown clutched to her throat. Fred is sitting, his back towards her, a faint light illuminating the simple bunks and wooden table.

“Fred? What on earth are you doing?”

He turns slowly, one ear hidden by the headset.

“It’s Freidrich, actually,” he says coldly, then aims the Luger at her chest.

“Poor Mabel, *mein Liebling*, remember what I always told you? ‘It’s war. And the first victim of war is...?’”

“Truth,” says Mabel, faintly, as her lifeless body slumps to the floor.

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