

A Brother Waiting

Every afternoon after school, I raced down the street to our mailbox. It was a red, old wooden mailbox that stood in Schomberg in front of our house, surrounded by wildflowers and tall grass that hadn't been cut in months. Most days, there was nothing inside except for newspapers and bills. But I checked anyway.

My older brother, Edgar, had been gone for almost a whole year.

Before the war, Edgar worked as an electrician. He was always fixing things around the house. If a lamp stopped working or a wire came loose, he could repair it in minutes. To me, He seemed like he could fix anything.

Then, in June 1915, he enlisted with the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles and sailed across the ocean to fight in Europe.

The day he left is a memory I will never forget. When we arrived at the station, I remembered the goodbyes so clearly. Our friends and relatives were crying. Dad and Mom were crying, tears after tears rolling down their cheeks, hugging him tightly and telling him that they were so proud of him and for him to write often. I could tell that part of them were so proud of him, while the other part was so sad, like they were worried that something would happen to him.

When he came to hug me, I automatically burst into tears. I comforted myself, saying that everything would be ok, but I knew it wouldn't. Edgar was my best friend; he did everything for me. He comforted me when I was sad, he took care of me even if he didn't have to, but he did. And now, now I didn't know what to do without him. When he got on the bus, he leaned out the window and waved.

"I'll be back before you know it," he called, and that was his last word. Now every letter from him was precious. Whenever one arrived, my family and I gathered around the kitchen table to hear it read aloud. His letters told us about muddy trenches, good friends, and dreams of returning home. Each one ended with the same message:

"Tell everyone not to worry. I'll see you again soon."

So every afternoon, I ran to the mailbox, hoping another letter would be waiting for me.

As weeks passed, I began to believe that Edgar would keep his promise. But one afternoon, when I returned home from school, I noticed my parents standing silently in the kitchen. A telegram lay open on the table. I asked my parents what happened. I could tell that they were debating on

telling me, but then, if anything could have been worse, they said that Edgar was reported missing after the Battle of Mount Sorrel.

I stood there, too stunned to do anything. No. This couldn't be right, I thought. He had promised he would come home.

"People are searching for him right now as we speak, but if he is missing, isn't there a possibility..." Mom said, trying not to cry. "No," I said, "Edgar always said that we can't lose hope in a tough situation, so we can't lose hope right now. We can't." I said, trying so hard to believe my words and not to cry.

"He's right. We have to have hope that he is ok. He probably is." Dad said, trying to look so strong for Mom and for me, but I know that deep inside, he also could cry at any moment if he wanted to, but he is not. Mom nodded.

That night, I heard my mom weep in their bedroom and my dad comforting her. I couldn't handle it anymore. I went to the bedroom, turned off my lights and tried to go to sleep, hoping that my brother was ok.

The days that followed felt longer than ever before. Every afternoon, I still ran to the mailbox hoping to find a letter from Edgar. Each time I opened it, I held my breath.

But there was never anything from him.

Weeks passed. Then months.

I began reading Edgar's old letters over and over again. Sometimes I could almost hear his voice as I read his words. Whenever I missed him the most, I reminded myself that he was only missing. Missing did not mean gone.

At least that was what I kept telling myself.

Months passed, but nothing changed. Every day, I still kept checking the mailbox. Every day, I hoped to see Edgar's familiar handwriting. Every day, I told myself that he would come home.

Then, on a cold and rainy morning, another telegram arrived.

The moment I saw it in my father's hands, my stomach dropped. Nobody spoke as we gathered around the kitchen table. Dad unfolded the paper slowly, his hands trembling.

As he read the message, the colour drained from his face.

For a long moment, there was only silence.

Finally, he looked up.

"They've stopped searching," he said quietly. "They believe Edgar was killed during the battle."

The words hit me harder than anything I had ever felt before.

Killed.

I stared at the telegram, hoping I had heard wrong. This wasn't supposed to happen. Edgar was supposed to come home. He had promised.

My mother covered her face with her hands and began to cry. Dad put an arm around her, but tears filled his eyes too. Then I started to cry, I wept and wept. My parents pulled me in to join them. We hugged each other and cried until we couldn't anymore.

I looked out the window and remembered the day Edgar left. I could still see him leaning out of the train, waving goodbye.

"I'll be back before you know it," he had said.

For the first time, I realized that he wasn't coming home.

Years passed, and life slowly moved forward. The pain of losing Edgar never completely disappeared, nor did the memories of him. I still remember the way he laughed, the way he could fix almost anything, and the promise he made before leaving for war.

One day, many years later, I stood before a memorial honouring the soldiers who had given their lives in the First World War. As I looked over the names, one name caught my eye.

Edgar Douglas.

I gently traced the letters with my finger and stood there in silence.

For years, I had wished for one more letter, one more conversation, one more chance to see my brother. But standing there, I realized something important. Although Edgar had never returned home, he had not been forgotten.

His name lived on in memorials, in history books, and in the memories of those who loved him. Most importantly, it lived on in me.

As I turned to leave, I thought back to all those afternoons spent running to the mailbox, hoping for a letter from my brother. The mailbox had long since grown old, but the hope I carried had changed into something else: remembrance.

Edgar never came home, but his story did.

And as long as people continue to tell it, he will never truly be gone.