

Flying Away Without You

“Nestled, in your wings my little one

This special morning brings another sun

Tomorrow, see the things that never come today....”

-Neil Young

The room was barren and dark. Two windows cut ragged scars into the shabby wallpaper in the far corner. The floor creaked as a pair of dark brown shoes made their way toward the windows. Shouts and jeers called softly from the window panes.

Gunshots and cheers fell delicately into the otherwise silent room.

“Come and look Madeline, we are finally free.”

And the face of an elderly woman, with the strains of a hard life etched across her aging face became illuminated by the light coming from the window. She had turned and beckoned to a child that was not there.

The shouts were growing louder and louder, in the streets of Alexanderplatz, East Berlin. The old woman could taste the freedom. She could see that portions of the wall were already falling. The view from the sixth story of the shabby apartment building was clear... it was finally over.

The swell of protestors had risen to extraordinary proportions, every street and side street was swollen with masses of bodies, calling for their freedom, calling for capitalism, and calling for access to the “land of freedom” they had been told of.

The old woman’s name was Sophie Ellington, and on that eve of November 4, 1989, she stood as a witness to the fall of communism.

“Come quickly, Madeline, and see!” Sophie called yet again, in eager excitement, to the child that was not in the room.

However, no bright and shining face came in response to the call. The room remained a host to only one. The answer to the call was the soft coo of a dove that came from behind a white door on the opposite side of the room. Sophie seemed to accept the fact that no child was coming.

“Very well then, Edward.” She turned to the white door and began to speak to the dove that she could not see, “Edward darling we are free!”

The room remained silent except for the passionate cries of, “*Friegheit!! Friegheit!!* Freedom!! Freedom,” That came in like a river of music through the cracks on the window panes.

Sophie continued to stare hard at the door. It was much like any other room in the shabby flat. It was whitewashed and chipped, with the wood peeking through the paint. She stared at it with great intensity, as if she was waiting for someone to turn the brass handle and come to her.

“Do you not remember when we married, Edward?”

“You are the reason I am here, did I ever tell you that?”

“Edward, darling, do you know that I still love you, even now?” Sophie spoke these three phrases with slight pauses in between them, listening between each breath for a response.

None came though, and Sophie resigned herself to look once more out the grimy window, to the streets of Berlin.

“Those thousand faces are all so young,” thought Sophie as she let her finger draw a heart in the fog that had grasped the window pane. “What could they possibly know?”

She turned away from the scene once again toward the whitewashed door.

Slowly, and deliberately, she let herself be torn away from the excitement outside, and moved toward it. The brass handle stood waiting for Mrs. Ellington, calling out that it was time for her to escape. Sophie Ellington grasped it in her moonlit hand and turned.

A scene so intensely different from the one she had just left met her eager eyes. Her feet moved from wood to bright shining marble, the color of clouds, imported from the west. In the far corner of the room there stood an elevated bathtub, the same shade of marble as the floor. The room was lit with a glass chandelier, which hovered above the scene. A painting of a field hung on the crimson wallpapered wall.

The accent of the room, however, was not the glass chandelier or the deep rich wallpaper, or the marble white tub, but rather a golden cage that swung from a pole on the left-side of the tub. It was as close as it could possibly be to the tall windows that showed the only glimpse of reality in the otherwise perfect room. Its metal bars kissed the glass.

Inside was the single white dove. His feathers were the color of snow, his eyes piercing ebony. He sat on a small golden perch within the bars, softly cooing. As Sophie entered, she immediately went over to the cage and reached her bony hand through the bars and stroked the passive bird, ruffling his fair feathers. He cooed. Sophie withdrew her hand, but it met resistance to this attempt. A piece of tarnished silver, from a bracelet on her wrist, had caught on the lock of the cage. She pulled at first distractedly, and then

with ever increasing intensity. She was trapped, she had no escape whatsoever, the links of the silver tied her to the stake of gold; in her mind she could see the fire being lit beneath her feet. Her mind was playing tricks; the claustrophobia of being caught was consuming her clear head. She tugged, and with one final jolt, the antique silver snapped, and the broken bracelet fell to the floor of the cage. Quickly Sophie retrieved her hand.

Most peculiarly she did not give the bracelet a second glance.

Mrs. Ellington walked over to the bathtub, and slowly turned its golden handles. Steaming hot water began to gush out. It hit the marble floor of the bathtub, and splattered up the sides. Sophie slowly began to take off her brown skirt and heavy wool sweater, which left little red scratches across her arms. She tore her eyes away from herself, and sat down on the edge of the bathtub to wait.

Steam had begun to rise, breathing on the three windows that bordered the bathtub, and that looked out on the scene below. A bottle and an empty glass sat on the small wooden dresser that held a sink. Sophie walked over slowly, took the bottle, and tipped it so that a dark crimson liquid, the color of the wallpaper, began to lick the sides of the glass. The bottle was emptied with a final pitter-patter of rosy liquid.

“The last of the wine.” Sophie whispered to herself, as she placed the glass in between the spindly crooks of her fingers.

She moved back to the tub. The water was steadily rising, and she sat down on the edge of the marble fountain. She took off the clunky brown shoes, and tenderly touched the scarlet swollen blisters that had formed since morning. She reached around and turned the golden spigot so that the water flow dwindled down to none. To her the sound disappeared, the entire calamity passed, and Sophie Ellington placed one elderly

foot into the ocean of warmth. Memories returned, little birds pushing out of cages of repression, and fluttering free. She was completely submerged in the balmy liquid. She put her long slender white leg up on the edge of the tub, took a sip of the red wine, letting it kiss her lips, and began to remember.

* * *

Surrey, England
August 30, 1940

The field was much like that of any other field. It stretched for miles in either direction. But, to me and a young man named Edward Ellington, lying on a soft quilt of its grass, it was a very special field indeed.

It was about mid-noon, on this hot August day. The fog and drizzle of the early morning had evaporated, and warm rays of sunshine had tenderly taken their places. I remember an apple tree. From my perspective it stretched to the heavens, painting the azure sky with pictures of fluffy white clouds. The little pink blossoms that had begun to peek out of the light green leaves last spring were now scattered on the ground.

My dress was pure white, with embroidery of pale red roses that wound up the low-cut scooped neck-line. His suit I remember perfectly. It was cut for his older brother, who had the unfortunate luck of catching pneumonia and dying three winters past. Needless to say, Edward Ellington III, looked a bit ridiculous in a gray suit that hung off of him, and a little grey hat cocked on his head. His deep chestnut hair hung around his face in wavy curls. His eyes were the color of the sky.

I moved to Surrey from London when I was fifteen. That was the day when I first laid eyes on Edward Ellington III. At the time he was nineteen. He was working on the

roof of his house when I walked by. I noticed him before he noticed me. He was quite simply the most beautiful person I had ever seen.

I kept walking, but I kept my eyes looking distractedly above, until I tripped. It was the sound of my body hitting the dirt road that caught his attention. A moment later his face was directly above mine. I saw him as if he was in a mirror.

“Are you all right?” was all he said.

I ignored him out of embarrassment and quickly stood up, knocking my head against his in the process.

“Oww!” I cried out, rubbing my head and trying to regain a bit of dignity. He laughed, and I blushed even deeper.

“Thank you for attending to me.” I said snobbishly, for I was from the city and had no idea what was in store for me in this little town. I began to walk away, when I felt a warm hand on my shoulder. I stopped in surprise and turned around. Edward Ellington III took that opportunity to jump in front of me.

“Excuse me, Sir,” I had said with a blush.

Edward refused to move. If I turned left, then he turned left. If I turned right, he turned right. Until I was left with no choice but to ask,

“What exactly is it that you want with me, Sir?”

“I think I want to marry you.” He smiled.

I think the smile is what sold me. It was a devious grin, a secretive smile, as if he knew a lot more to life than I would ever care to. I could not help but smile back. I pushed him aside and began to walk away.

“And where will I propose to you?” he called at my back.

“Well if you care to find me, I just moved into that house up there.” I pointed at the large white house on the grassy knoll in front of us.

He grinned and walked away. I held back a smile and also continued on my way.

Edward Ellington did care to find me, and three years later I found myself in that field with him.

Our hands were clutched close together, and protected by the patch of white lilies they lay in. The balmy English breeze ran its fingers through my long blonde hair, catching little lavender and cherry flowers and placing them on my head as a crown. The scent of the lavender stroked our skin. Summer was finally ending.

“There is a war going on, Love.” He whispered in my ear.

I didn’t respond, my eyes were shut, I was daydreaming, floating on clouds.

“Love? Did you hear me?” He ran his fingers over my mouth. I opened my eyes with a laugh. The tall grasses stretched far above my head.

“What do you want now?” I playfully scolded him.

“The war, Love. It has been going on for nearly a year now.” He repeated.

“Yes, I know the war has been going on.” I responded a little bitterly, for it was absolutely the last thing that I wished to talk about at that moment

“Well, Darling.” He said hesitantly, noticing my sharpened tone. “You saw in the papers that the Germans bombed London last week?”

“Yes, I saw.” I said, and thought to myself “Of course I saw! Mother cried all morning, convinced that our London house had been flattened!”

He continued on, ignorant to my sarcastic thoughts,

“I have been waiting to tell you this, but I guess now is better than never. Absolutely splendid news! I have enlisted in the Royal Army. I am to be deployed to Germany! Isn’t that marvelous?”

He was grinning from ear to ear. The promise of a war, that he knew nothing of the horrors of, etched on his face. Marvelous was about as far from the adjective I was truly thinking to describe the news he had just told me. He was leaning over me, as I lay in the grass. I saw him upside down, as I had the first day I met him. I turned my head a bit so that I was looking directly into his sparkling eyes. He leaned over and kissed me lightly. He was far too anxious to hear my reply, of what he thought would be exuberant glee, to wait any longer.

“I have no idea why I never enlisted before now or why the government hasn’t been knocking at my door, but I am ready, and I am going!” There was a pause “So, what do you think?”

“Well,” I paused. I was on the verge of crying, begging him not to leave me. On the verge of doing anything to make him tell me that it was a joke and for him to remain looking down on my face in that beautiful field, with his grey felt hat cocked on his head, forever. But I didn’t. I didn’t tell the truth. I told a simple lie, a lie out of love.

“Oh, Darling!! That is wonderful! I am so happy for you, so excited. Really, I am so proud! You are so brave.”

The relief that washed over his face at my “pleased” reaction and the happiness that shone from his face was enough to make that lie very worth while.

“I will kill 10,000 of the enemy for you! That’s a promise. And then I will come home. I will walk up those white steps and pick you up off your feet, and say, Love, I am home!”

I laughed and touched his cheek,

“As long as you promise to come home healthy and with all of your limbs! I will not be swept off my feet by a one-legged war veteran.” I stuck my tongue out at him and managed a laugh.

“I promise to come back with all of my limbs then. But there is something I want to ask you. Close your eyes.”

As I closed my eyes, he lifted me up into his arms and placed me on a low bough of the apple tree, so that my bare-feet dangled above the grassy slope. He stood below me, took off his hat in a flourish and proceeded to get down on my knee.

“Miss Sophie Butler, would you do me the honor of marrying this lonely soldier before he marches off to battle?”

I had the unfortunate habit of screaming when I heard something exciting, and that is exactly what I did. I jumped off the bough, into his arms. I wrapped my legs around his back and with no second thought, no reality of getting married at age eighteen to a soldier that would be leaving, I said the simple word, yes!

In the far corner of the field a flock of birds had taken flight. In the time in which Edward and I had been talking they had been conversing, searching for a doomed worm to poke its head out of the dewy blades of grass. The scream had, however, awakened them from their stupor of the humdrum search for sustenance. They took flight together,

stretching their light brown wings, diving through the intricate branches of the apple trees, taking breaths of freedom.

The wedding was exactly a fortnight later. It was at the little church in town. My mother and father almost killed Edward when we came rushing home to tell the news. Daddy actually had the rifle from the shelf above the fireplace.

All my mother could ask was if I was pregnant and if that is why I had chosen to disgrace the family by marrying a common working boy at the age of eighteen. I told her that hopefully I wasn't, but you never can tell right away. She had fainted at that. That was when Daddy had gotten down the rifle.

"I can assure you, Mr. Butler, she is not pregnant, but that is why I want to marry her." I don't think that was exactly what Edward had meant to say, but it was enough to get the rifle loaded.

"Daddy, stop it! I love him. And if you wanted me to marry a city man so badly why did we ever move here?"

It was a good point, which he cared not to accept at the time. Nevertheless, I became Sophie Butler Ellington. A week after the wedding, he left me on the porch, waving goodbye.

"I'm off to war!" he said at the bottom of the steps and he tipped his hat and turned his back on me.

His light brown and olive green uniform tightly fit the curves of his back, he held his hat proudly in his left hand and his gun was slung across his back. I continued to wave goodbye to the back that now faced me, goodbye to the virgin eyes before they were

scarred by the war, goodbye to the soft cheeks that would grow rough, and goodbye to the only man I ever loved.

* * *

The elderly Sophie had taken a washcloth and was slowly wringing out water down her back. She began to twiddle with the gold spigot, turning it on and off. Letting the hot water mix with the luke warm water. She took a sip of the wine and then let the glass dangle in her hand outside of the tub. What is it about memories, which slowly drips down the throats of those who subject themselves to them? They trickle down to the heart and take hold with a convoluted mixture of melancholy and serenity.

* * *

He did not return for a year and a half. The telegram had said that a two-week Christmas furlough had been granted to Mr. Edward Ellington as a result of a recovering shoulder wound and his heroic and great contribution to the Royal Army. I re-read that telegram a hundred times before I was convinced that it was not an illusion. In the end I realized it was not; he was really coming home.

The past year had been the hardest, but most fulfilling of my life. To be so distanced from a lover tests strengths that many know not of. The words “waiting” and “longing” defined my life in short, always waiting for that next letter. It had become a ritual that a letter would not arrive until I had reached my own personal breaking point, the point where I just could not stand the wait any longer. The point where I began to hate him, the point where I believed nothing could possibly be worth this anguish. I would decide in a fit of range, as the postmaster would leave me empty handed, yet again, that I would not wait a minute longer, that I would call for a divorce and be free.

Though never more than a day later, without fail, the letter would come, the hand would catch me right before I fell and dangle me off the cliff. It was a brutal and torturous existence, but I knew not that my suffering of the heart was nothing compared to the suffering that had taken a grip upon the necks of our young English boys so far away. So I would read the letter once, then twice, over and over again, toying with the idea of holding back my own letters, to torture him as he did to me, but I never did, I always succumbed, succumbed to love and to temptation.

It was nearly two weeks later when he finally came marching up the long winding road in Surrey. Every morning for the past year, I had taken a cup of tea, wrapped a blanket around my barren shoulders, and sat on the porch looking down that road. I would sit in a little white rocking chair, slowly rocking back and forth, and imagine him walking up that road. It was always before dawn, and I would watch the sunrise, the pastel colors painting the sky, taking long sweeping brushes of love across the canvas. Every morning I waited and now this morning, December 19th, was the one.

His figure began as a little brown speck in the distance, becoming larger and larger until, in my sleepy state, I realized that it was him. A scream, at a much louder decibel than the one I had shouted when he had asked me to marry him, issued from my lips. A scream that startled a flock of black crows that had been taking tentative morning steps across the lawn, into a disturbed flight. I could hear my parents wake up inside, but I ignored everything behind me and began to run down the lane. The sun was now in full view, caressing my white cheeks, highlighting my lavender dress as I ran. The moment that I had dreamed of was finally here. It was in slow motion that I ran towards him.

His smile was like a ray of sunshine. It was something that I had dreamed of for months.

“I’m back, Love!” He said with that devious grin and he swooped me up into his arms.

For a fortnight he was home, and it was heaven.

The memories are those of love, touching the face that previously was seen only in memory.

He woke me up late one night, shaking my sleeping figure, and whispered in my ear, “I want to take you somewhere.”

I got up, and wrapping a blanket around my shoulders, followed him outside into the freezing cold December air.

We made our way through the barren fields to the one in which he had proposed.

We lay down amongst the frozen grass, huddled close to keep warm. As we lay there, watching the stars nestle among the ebony blanket of the sky, he reached over and gently kissed my cheek. I turned to him, my eyes painted with love.

“Look up, Love” he said to me, “And make a wish on a shooting star.”

I closed my eyes and wished; as I did he slipped something over my thin wrist, and kissed my closed eye. I opened my eyes and looked at the silver bracelet that now lay across my white skin.

“It is a promise bracelet.” He said to me, “We are married with the ring but we are in love with the bracelet.”

I smiled, and swore to never take it off, and I never thought I would.

I did not cry the day he left. The sadness welled up inside, but the tears would not come. I had thought of this day for the past two weeks. I cried at least once on each of those days, but now that it was here the tears did not come. I stood on the porch, just as I had the day he first left and the day returned. Now he was leaving again.

Life is a series of goodbyes.

It was a beautiful crisp day, snow had fallen the night before, and the hills were now frosted with the ashen powder. I looked into his eyes, clutching his two hands in mine. Our fingers interlocked like piano keys.

The parting kiss is one that I will never forget. No words can possibly describe the memory of happiness.

“Promise me.” He said, quickly breaking the mood of ecstasy. “Promise me that if I do die, you will find the place where I fell.”

I looked at him in amazement, how could he possibly mention dying? I did not respond.

“Please promise me, Love.” His eyes had changed. The dark tint that was unrecognizable to me when he returned home came to the forefront once again. I was looking at a different person. There was no longer a boy standing in front of me, there was a man who had seen something that I could not understand. I noticed at that point the look of sadness that painted the dark corners of his azure eyes, and the lines of hunger, just about concealed along his cheeks. So I promised.

“I will come and find the ground where you fell, and I will lie down in the dirt and mud and kiss it. I will get my dress covered in mud and I will never get up from that

place. I will stay huddled there, where you bled last, and never leave.” I finished and kissed him lightly on the cheek. I had never spoken words so truthful in my life.

He smirked, a smirk of mocking my intensity and a smirk of love.

And then he left. I was faced with the lonesome portrait of a man’s back

There he was, walking quite alone, down a path that would lead from pleasant reality to horrifying fantasy.

Edward Ellington would never walk that path again.

The telegram came exactly three years and seven months later.

But long before that, I had discovered on a snowy January day, a few weeks after Edward had left, that I was pregnant. My parents were horrified. Their dreams that I would forget about the second class Edward and find a suitable husband were dashed by the little fists that grew inside of me.

I could not explain my own emotions. In a way, I also shared in that horrified reaction, but for a different reason. I was horrified at the fact that I was going to raise a little child, without the help of a father. Those feelings soon drifted away as I spent every night serenading the little baby inside of me with lullabies on the piano in the sitting room. I began to see that unborn child as something precious of Edward’s that I could hold on to. Nine months later, Madeline Patricia Ellington was born.

She looked exactly like her father, with blue eyes and dark chestnut hair. I tried to raise her the best I could, but there was something always lacking, and that was Edward. I wrote to him the day I had found out that I was pregnant and the day that Madeline was born. Both times he wrote back in joy saying that he had almost killed a colonel trying to get leave to come home.

He never did get that leave, and so I waited, and Madeline continued to grow, and we both kept our ears close to the radio every night with the hope that a voice would calmly tell us that the war was finally over.

Three years past; letter after letter came from Edward. My previous anger at his delayed responses had changed dramatically with the birth of Madeline. We were growing up together, both clinging helplessly to each other's love.

The answer to all of the waiting came on an unusually chilly morning. The morning had come in with fog, London weather. It was miserable. I had not slept. Madeline had a fever, that kept her fitfully awake the night before, and me by her side. By the time that seven o'clock came, I was ready to curl up and die.

Fifteen minutes and ten seconds passed before that unusually early telegram came. In those fifteen minutes, I sat in a luke-warm bath. My eyes were open, vacant abysses, my body was weak. I held his last letter in my hand. It was post-marked four weeks earlier. It was the letter I had been waiting for. The letter that told me, in his own hand, that Hitler had committed suicide and that the Germans had surrendered that spring. I was too distracted by lack of sleep, however, to notice that I had let it fall from my hand into the swirling water.

It was the shortest bath I had ever taken. With two minutes to spare before that inevitable knock, I had put on a black dressing gown, and made my way downstairs. Two and a half steps from the bottom I stopped dead. A pitter-patter had caught my attention, the sound of hand against wood. I saw it all before it happened, I knew what the knock meant, and I did not move. One of the servants came and answered the white paneled door. I closed my eyes and stood on that one chestnut step, I could not breathe.

The door shut again, and the entranceway now played host to fog and a telegram.

Mrs. Edward Ellington:

On June 30, 1945, Captain Edward Ellington fell victim to a bullet from a German sniper, during the march to Berlin. He died shortly after, and his body will be sent home promptly.

That is what that un-opened telegram in Mary's pale hand said. I stared at it from above.

"Mrs. Ellington, a telegram for you, Ma'am." She called up at my paused body, in a voice that hinted that she knew what it said too.

"But the war, Hitler..." I paused in confusion. "Hitler committed suicide in April. The Germans, they surrendered in May. That's where Edward was stationed." I couldn't speak; I stumbled through those words in a horrified realization. He couldn't have died; the war was over. He was supposed to be coming home to me.

Mary still held the telegram out to me. I did not move, so she came and placed it in my hands. I opened it slowly, and read those words. At first, I could not react, and then in one short breathless moment, I fainted. At that exact same moment, a scream from Madeline pierced the house. Later I learned that a bird had flown into her window pane. She took my role of screaming when presented with surprising news, and she still was innocent to the situation.

"So he is dead then."

"So this says, good riddance if you ask me."

“John don’t say that. That is her husband you are talking about.” There was a short pause in her speech, “Is she all right should we get a doctor?”

“If only he had died just a few years back, then she would not have a child to bring her down in polite English society.” His voice retorted back with no feeling whatsoever.

They were the voices of my parents. Slowly I opened my eyes.

“Darling are you all right?” cooed my mother.

I did not respond; of course, I was not all right. There was an awkward silence. I looked up at my father. He was holding a gun, and I remembered that today was the hunting day he had been planning.

I began to weep uncontrollably.

“Excuse me.” Was all I could get out, and I ran to Madeline’s room and slammed the door.

Her innocent calm figure met my whirlwind of tears and disheveled hair. My robe was falling off of my shoulders, my eyes were wild with confusion, and yet there she stood, as innocent as a little white dove, in the middle of the room, her little white nightgown clutching her skin, her one thumb in her mouth. She was a little dove, and I did not want to be the hunter that would shoot her out of the sky.

All of my anguish over Edward’s death was at that moment transferred into the pure and much more painful reality of having to tell my little girl that the father she had never known was not coming home.

“What’s the matter, Mommy?” Her voice was still weak from recovering from the fever that had not broken until the early hours of the morning, and she rubbed her hand sleepily to her eye.

I couldn't stand for a moment more, I sat down where I stood. I beckoned for her to come closer.

“Come here, Baby.”

She came obediently, and I told her.

I told her, calmly, the absolute truth. Her reaction was unforgettable. She really didn't understand what I had said at all.

She quickly got up from my lap, tore her eyes away from my concerned ones, and walked over to her bed. I watched with anxiety as she slowly moved her pillow aside, and reached for something. It was a piece of paper. I got up and walked over to see what it was. The moment I saw it I broke down.

It was a picture she had been drawing, a picture of a bright field. It had all the marks of a rudimentary child-like drawing, yet it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. In it were three people, a little girl,

“And a mommy and a daddy.” She said to me in a quiet trampled voice. “Is there no daddy?” she asked in a morbid curiosity.

“No, Baby” I said through the teardrops, “This means there is no daddy”

Slowly she took the paper between her little fingers and tore it so that the picture was left with only two people. She put that piece back on the bed, took the ripped piece, and moved away from my side to the window. She struggled to open it, as I watched, entranced, from her bedside. Finally, it was pushed open enough for her liking, and she put her hand outside the window and let go of the ripped piece of the paper, letting go of daddy. The broken piece fluttered out the window, like a little bird, until it disappeared in the omnipotent clutches of the fog.

We had quail that night. Daddy had shot it that afternoon. It was the only kill of the hunting trip that had been planned for weeks and would simply not go interrupted by a matter as trivial as a broken heart. I had heard the shot from Madeline's room that I had not left all day. I had been leaning out the window, letting the fog meander into the room, letting it devour the sunny yellow walls. The shot woke Madeline and she jumped up from her bed on the other side of the room.

Daddy came trudging home two hours later, carrying the bloody quail in one hand, letting it dangle lifeless from his fingers. He told the house that it hadn't been a good hunting day, but to me, that one bird seemed a large enough casualty to break my heart.

The funeral was exactly three weeks later; a day after the casket arrived home on the plane. The casket fell into the earth, calmly and serenely, as if it had always been destined to snuggle along the dirt wallpapered grave. I looked over at his parents and saw my grief mirrored in his mother's eyes. The ceremony went by, and I slowly walked over to the grave to say my last goodbyes.

"Goodbye, Love." I said to the black coffin, and turned away with one tear gently kissing the cheek that he had last kissed. The birds sang in the trees and slowly, bit by bit, my heart began to die.

A week later I had packed Madeline's things and my own, and in the middle of the night, without a note, I left my great white house behind, and was on my way to fulfill a promise that I had made four years ago.

We arrived in London, secured our travel permits, and embarked to a large city by the name of Berlin, a city we knew nothing about.

We got off the plane early in the morning, leaving all memory of home behind. I knew where I had to go; I knew what I had to do.

That night I stood on the road which Edward had last marched and looked skyward for a sign that I had done the right thing, to secure the fulfillment of my promise.

That day had been the longest of my life. Before arriving in Berlin I knew nothing of the bombed and broken city that had been the last one my love had seen. I knew nothing of the starved faces of the Germans, or of the division of the city.

I had been greeted by a shy young American colonel at the airstrip, who had, in his words, outlined that it would be impossible for me to travel to the roads that led into East Berlin. But, there I was that night.

I was not to enter the Soviet sector of Berlin, I was to carry my travel papers on me at all times, and most importantly I was informed, after I inquired, that the only entry to the road on which Edward had marched would be through East Berlin. The colonel smiled at me when he finished his list of barriers that would keep me from Edward and handed a bar of chocolate from his pocket to Madeline, who took it eagerly. He turned away, but I knew that he was the only hope for me, and so I changed my life by calling out the words to his back,

“Wait, Sir, may I speak with you elsewhere?”

He turned, smiled at me, and we walked off together, with Madeline tagging behind.

In the end he broke the law for me and that night he left me standing on the desolate road that led into East Berlin.

“Are you sure you will be all right, Mrs. Ellington?” he asked shyly.

I could tell that he didn't want to leave me. I could tell that he wanted to never leave me. I had just spent the last thirty minutes convincing him that I needed to be alone at that moment, however.

"Thank you, for all you have done for me, Johnny." Was all I said to him, and leaned forward and gently kissed him.

He appeared to blush, "This is how you contact me, please do."

He handed me a folded piece of paper and he turned away. I was soon faced with yet another back walking away from me.

The road stretched out for miles; there was no way that I could pin-point the exact spot where Edward had fallen. The dark landscape around me consumed my spirit. Raindrops began to pitter-patter on my white cheeks. I stood there, holding Madeline's hand on that road, searching for release. A crack of thunder broke the silence, and the rain began to pour down.

"Mommy! Mommy! It's raining we have to go back inside!" Madeline cried as she tugged at my pants in desperation.

But I did not listen to her at all. I fell down in the now muddy grass along side the road. Madeline stood over me, in frightened confusion. As I fell, the piece of paper the American had handed me flew from my hand in a gust of angry wind.

I let my tears gush forth from my eyes, as I lay flat out in the mud, kissing the ground as I had promised him I would. I forgot everything else except him, and had no intention of ever getting up from that spot. My intentions were hindered however, as a truck sped past us, Madeline who had been standing right beside the road, jumped back in tears.

She screamed as the truck sped past, its headlights illuminating our vulnerability. Her scream was not the only one. A bird that had been grounded by the whirling wind and rain, and caught in the mud, had fallen victim to the spinning rubber of the truck's tires. The noise and light awakened me. Slowly I got up; my pants and shirt were now caked with mud. I made no attempt to brush it off. I took one look at the dead bird that lay beside my feet, took Madeline's hand without a word, and as if nothing had happened, we made our way back through the rain towards Berlin.

I left the spot that I promised Edward that I would never leave.

What I did not know, was that I had left myself with him. I had left my identity.

Lying in the mud was a single yellow piece of paper. In the very place that I had promised Edward I would never leave was the travel paper that had been issued to me in London. The only piece of paper that proved I was a British citizen, the only piece of paper that guaranteed my exit from Berlin.

Two days later, as I stood in the sunny flat, packing my trunk and getting ready to leave that morning, I stopped dead. The paper was no where to be found. I screamed, and began to tear apart the flat. I never guessed that it had fallen from my pocket that night along the road until a day many years later, as I watched the first construction of the Berlin wall begin, and by then it was far too late.

My love had left me trapped. I looked out the window of the flat at a unit of Soviet troops that was marching by. Desperation was painting my soul; I had never felt so trapped and vulnerable in my life. I quickly got dressed and made my way to the line of offices along the East and West Berlin border, to where the American troops guarding the border were stationed.

I was met by a young officer, who listened to my tale without flinching. He did not believe I was British. He thought I was one of the many Germans who came by daily, with the realization that they had been, by an omnipotent power they had no control over, divided from their brothers and sisters, and placed on the more dangerous side of the fence.

The man looked at Madeline and me standing there, with dismay and resignation.

“There is nothing I can do, Ma’am.” He said in a tone that suggested he would do anything in his power to let us pass, if he was allowed.

“I am British, though!” I screamed at him in utter desperation “I don’t belong here! I just came here to find the place where my husband died! You must believe me, Sir!” I was crying, tears pouring down my horrified face.

The man looked down, his job was to maintain the border between American occupied Berlin and Soviet occupied Berlin, and I was trapped on the wrong side, there was nothing he could do.

“You have no papers to prove that you are not a citizen of East Berlin, Ma’am, and with the current state of things the Soviet government has forbidden any exit of citizens from their area of occupation.”

“But I’m not German! My husband was Edward Ellington; he was a soldier in the British Army!” I looked at him with pleading eyes.

“British troops have not been stationed here, Ma’am, The Potsdam conference last summer granted the area in which you live under Soviet control. There would have been no way that you could have entered this area of Berlin prior to our occupation or after.”

I didn't mention the day I had spent with the American colonel to convince him to take me there. I couldn't, I knew that it would cost him his rank, if I betrayed him. So, I remained silent.

The fact that I had done everything within my power to arrange that American colonel to take me out of West Berlin and out onto the roads leading into the Soviet occupied East Berlin, to find the place where I knew Edward had fallen seemed irrelevant now. He had left me standing there on that road that night and had secured the flat for me in East Berlin, so I was indebted to him, a debt I could never repay. I did not even know his full name, but he had secured that my promise had been fulfilled, and I would not betray him now.

A stabbing guilt made my heart bleed when I reasoned to myself that I had indeed used his shy infatuation and kindness to my own advantage, without a second thought of him as more than an instrument to get what I needed so desperately. I shook my head of any thought of that young American colonel and looked directly at the American in front of me.

“You must believe that I am a British citizen, you must!”

The American man took one last look in my desperate eyes and one last glance at the crying Madeline that clung to my dress and said the one word that would haunt me for the rest of my life, the one word that imprisoned me forever, “Denied.”

And he got up and left us standing there without a country, without a place to go, and most importantly without freedom.

I never thought clearly again. It never had crossed my mind that I could write home and arrange for my parents to confirm my citizenship. It never occurred to me that there

were many ways that I could get home. In a way, I did not want to leave. Berlin was an escape from the reality of Edward's death. I was as close to him as I ever could possibly be, in the city where he marched last. I rented a shabby flat and began a new life as a woman without a country.

On August 13, 1961, many years after those words had been spoken to me, the Soviets began construction of the Berlin Wall that would in concrete and bricks, ensure that I was to never see freedom again.

Madeline had died a short year after our arrival in Berlin of a sudden illness.

She was the only thing that had tied me to the world of freedom that I once lived, the only thing that tied me to Edward, and the only person that was left on earth that I truly loved. Now I was truly alone in a hostile and divided country, a caged bird with no escape.

* * *

As quickly as the memories came, they faded. The water had turned bitter cold, the dark light in the room stroking its icy hand through it.

Sophie opened her eyes.

There was no marble bath, but a dilapidated claw foot tub, with pieces of the chipping porcelain swirling in the water around her. There was no pure white virgin skin along Sophie's arm, but old parched wrinkly sheets that clung to the bones so clearly visible. The floor wasn't fine marble from the west and the light did not come from a glass chandelier. Rather, Sophie Ellington sat in a room very similar to the one she had come from, a room that had seen age and oppression, and suffered through it all. The distortion between reality and fantasy is vast when seduced by memory.

The cage in the corner was also dramatically different, there were no golden bars, but rather crudely cut iron ones.

The dove however was the same.

It looked down at Sophie with an indecisive look. Was it love or was it hate? The look haunted the woman as she lay in the bath, her mind befuddled by memories. The bird did not turn its lonesome head; rather it continued to seduce Sophie with opened ebony eyes.

Slowly as if in a trance Sophie stood up, letting the water cascade down her pearly skin, a waterfall of a most unusual nature. She lifted one wrinkled foot out of the swirling whirlpool of memories, then the other.

She then stood on the cold floor, her feet leaving a watery remembrance that she had been there. She moved unhurriedly to the cage, her eyes glazed, her body moving as if forced to take the gradual steps. The shouts from outside grew louder and louder in her mind as she approached the cage. The dove continued to stare into her light azure eyes. Sophie took her hand as she had done to stroke the bird, but instead of reaching inside, she took the key that dangled on a hook above the window and delicately coaxed it into the lock and turned.

Without opening the cage door, she took the cage off of the rusty hook and took the step to the window. With her one remaining hand she turned the brass lock and pushed at the grimy glass.

The window however would not budge; it clung to the wooden sill with all its might, the shouts from outside continuing to bounce off its façade. The woman pushed harder

and the dove began to flap his long since idle wings. Finally the window gave way, years of dirt breaking free of the wood.

Once that initial seal broke, the window still resisted the push of the Sophie's hand, as if screaming out "no!" When it reached a suitable height and the bitter cold November wind began to whip through Mrs. Ellington's long white hair, she released her hand from the smudged glass, leaving her handprint firmly etched in it. Without a second thought, she interlocked her finger into the door of the cage and pulled. A narrow passageway between the bars was now left, an escape to freedom.

The dove however did not immediately fly forth; he almost cowered on its perch, hesitant to fly out into the harsh chilly wind. Sophie reached in her hand and guided it towards the opening in the bars. Slowly, hesitantly, the dove dipped his head out into the air of freedom. The taste cleared its head and it raised its crumpled wings. Within seconds he soared out of the window, his wings grazing the glass. Sophie watched as he glided across the ebony sky, his wings stretched for the first time, and then she turned her head quickly from the scene, slamming the window easily shut. She walked back to the bathtub and climbed back in again. The water was now cold.

The light from the single taper flickered out as Sophie turned to look out the large window to left of the bathtub. There was a commotion outside, the noise level that had been escalating all night reached a pinnacle and had turned into a deafening cacophony. The shouts were joyous, full of hope. A bulldozer could be seen, parting the sea of people, a Moses parting the Red Sea, leading his people to freedom.

Sophie could not believe that the time had finally come. She had waited, with an incomprehensible patience, waited for just over forty years. Waited for a freedom she

believed would never come. The beautiful innocent face of the young girl who had come to mourn her true love's death, no longer existed. Instead a face of wrinkles had taken its place.

A wrinkle just above the left eye to represent the hunger, the lack of bread.

A wrinkle just above the right eye that showed the horrors she had seen.

A wrinkle just above the mouth, to represent the silence she had had to keep.

A wrinkle along the left cheek, which showed her endurance to survive the oppression of communism.

A wrinkle along the right cheek, for she had turned the other cheek.

And a wrinkle that ran to her heart, which cut deep into the skin. The one of pain, of losing her daughter, the one true connection she had to a life forgotten.

She was a broken woman, a sheep in a herd of wolves. Now it had ended.

Outside the calls of, "*Wir wollen raus!* We want out!!" called louder and louder.

"I should be out there," thought Sophie as she raised the glass of red wine to her lips. But she didn't move.

The lights grew brighter and brighter, now the black sky was illuminated with a million flickers of hope. The bulldozer was feet away from the wall.

Suddenly there was silence in Sophie's aged mind. The sound floated off across the streets. All she could hear was a high-pitched scrapping as metal hit stone. The bulldozer had reached the Berlin wall. There was a pause in sound, and then it came. The metal drew back its hand and with all its might slapped the stone across the cheek. It staggered.

Back in Russia, Gorbachev staggered, a thousand KGB officers staggered. The people, the oppressed, drew back their steely hand again. The bitterness and oppression stung the wall, and it began to crumble. Rock by rock, day by day, murder by murder, silenced tongue by silenced tongue, it began to fall. The rocks kissed the ground of freedom. Faces began to appear from the West. Light began to stream into the streets of Alexanderplatz, Berlin. There was no stopping it now, after so many years.

There was no stopping it now.

Sophie smiled, turning away from the masses of people who had begun to dance in the streets below her. Freedom, what was it really? She couldn't remember.

The wrinkles seemed to fade again. Sophie reached for her heart. The water had turned brackish with salty tears. Slowly the glass fell from Mrs. Ellington's hand. It shattered on the rough wooden floor. The red liquid drifted off along the floor boards, mixing with the blood and sacrifice of so many who longed for freedom. The final stone hit the ground outside. Sophie Ellington had lived to see freedom. She looked out at the night sky. A single star painted the illuminated heavens. She closed her eyes and wished one last time.

Near the window, the bracelet was left discarded in the now empty cage.

Mrs. Sophie Ellington's hand dropped against the tub, and the lights merged into one.

Six days later refugees were allowed to leave East Berlin.

“When you see me fly away without you, shadow on the things you know

Feathers fall around you, and show you the way to go

It's over, it's over.”

-Neil Young