

JES DIDN'T NEED SAID

A CIVIL WAR SHORT STORY



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JES DIDN'T NEED SAID

1865, Virginia

I didn't need no letter to tell me my son was dead. I knew the night it happened, just like I know when the first night of frost is goin' to sneak up on summer's tail.

I think the missus knew, too. She was especially quiet that night, and soon as supper was finished, I saw her goin' to the mantel and takin' the lid from the box. She read his letters so often that they were right worn down.

Most of the time I wouldn't say anything. I'd go out back with my pipe and tobacco, jes sittin' and listenin' to a world closin' its eyes in sleep.

But that night, I didn't go out with my pipe. I sat there by the fireplace an' I asked straight out if she'd read 'em to me.

I 'member how her brows raised. Ne'er did say much, my missus. Always just kind o' looked at me real slow like, an' when she was finally of a mind to answer, her voice was sort of hushed and quiet. Guess that's the thing I always did like 'bout her. Ne'er cared much for folks who were

always talkin' and talkin', with nothin' much to say anyhow.

Well, I reckon the missus knew a bit o' pride went into my askin'. In all the years we'd been married, she ne'er did ask me if I could read, an' I ne'er did tell her I couldn't. I always figured such things didn't need to be said.

The first letter was the second night young Tommy was away. Said he wrote it in his saddle whilst he was still travellin', an' mailed it at the next town they come to.

The missus always smiled on that letter. I know 'cause her smiles are so scarce I always take account of what she's doin' and what's makin' her happy. A man likes to 'member something like that.

The next letter took away her smile, and I can't rightly blame her. Tommy ne'er was good with words, but I reckon he was better than me because I could picture the battle just like he wrote it. The red an' blue flag jes blowin' in the wind, the bugle call, the canon fire...an ol' Stonewall Jackson on his stompin' steed.

Pride an' sadness ain't likely related, but there weren't much to distinguish them that night. I leaned back in the rockin' chair an' watched the missus fetchin' another letter still.

This one she read real different than the others. Sort of teary-eyed and sniffin', which weren't her way at all. Twas on account of Tommy talkin' so much 'bout the Good Book, sayin' how prayerful he'd been and such. Even said once how he prayed for the blue coats.

I kind o' stiffened and scowled a bit, but the missus only wiped at more tears. I figured she was kind o' happy that he'd done that.

There was only one last letter in the box. The missus took it out, smoothed the wrinkles, and tugged her chair closer to the fire, so's she could better see in the darkness.

Ol' Tommy accounted a few things that sort of made me chuckle, like how he had to teach his own lieutenant how to set a bear trap, an' how the only girl in camp kept a smilin' at him alone.

Then he wrote something that made my stomach start twistin' and turnin'. How he had no choice but to run his bayonet through a blue belly's throat, an' how the poor boy's scream kept a followin' him day an' night.

The missus ne'er finished that letter. With her careful folding, she creased it an' folded it an' put it back in the wooden box with the others. She ne'er said another word, just gathered her knittin' an' slipped yonder into the bedroom.

That was months ago, clear back when the springtime was just a bloomin' an' the trees were dressin' with leaves. We both kind o' watched all summer long for another letter, but nothin' e'er came until the summertime flew away and the winter blew in.

Then the last letter came.

I didn't rightly know what to say when I brought it home. For all my lookin' at it, I couldn't tell if it was Tommy's scrawl or not. All looks like broken twigs on the forest floor when a person don't know how to read.

She was standin' at the sink when I came up behind her. Her old shirt was rolled to her elbows, and them bony little hands of hers was plunGIN' in and out of soapy water. She must o' known I was there 'cause she turned all of a sudden and stared at me.

I thrust it toward her.

Took so long for her to open it, I thought the snow would be gone and another spring comin' by the time she finished readin'.

But it didn't take near so long, and when she finally lifted her eyes, I couldn't help wishin' she'd taken longer.

There weren't no tears, but I kind o' sensed that if she spoke, they'd come flowin' sure as rain.

I didn't hardly trust my own voice, but I asked her to read it to me anyhow.

But she didn't. She took a step close to me an' laid her wrinkled hand on my arm. A tear, a smile, another sad little frown that made me want to bury inside a sack of feed an' not come out again.

Then she unrolled her sleeves, an' went to the mantel, an' opened the wooden box. She put the letter with the others.

There wasn't much I could do, an' I didn't rightly know what to say, neither. I went back outside and went to workin' with my pitchfork in the barn, tossin' hay into the air, an' sneezin' e'ery so often.

The missus ne'er did tell me what the letter said, an' I ne'er did ask her to read it again. I guess we both kind o' figured some things didn't need to be said.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



WILLOWY WHISPER is a young Christian fiction author, graphic designer, and photographer. She lives in a beautiful place called West Virginia, nestled between mountain and field. She is the author of eleven novels, nine of which are published, and numerous short stories.

She enjoys playing the piano, guitar, mandolin, and ukulele. She is also a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, an incurable romantic, and a passionate dreamer.

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