

Candidate 2 evidence

The Sound of Silence

Silence. It is a powerful word. It can be associated with tranquillity, peace, excitement, death. I used to love sitting in silence, taking in the world around me, often sitting under a tree in the park with a good book in hand. Then the war hit. It's bewildering how one disagreement between countries can throw millions of people's lives off course. Including mine.

I used to wonder what life would be like if I were to be whisked away from my family to a home in a strange, unfamiliar place. Before September of last year, that remained a wonder. But now, things have changed. I'd always lived alone with my Father. Our relationship was... complicated to say the least. I have always been unable to connect with him, and he never made any effort to speak to me. Mother died when I was born so I've lived a very quiet life so far. Father was often away all day at work, and when he was home he didn't talk, or play games with me like you'd expect. I never did find out exactly what he actually worked as or what he had to do. He never came home at the same time, never brought home anything other than newspapers, and he never had any colleagues come and visit us. I often stayed out with my friends for several hours after school, to stay away from him and his miserable nature. He hired a housekeeper for when I came home and for the weekends, but she was hardly ever around, and he never did find that out. Nowadays I've almost forgotten the sound of his voice. Instead, he was replaced by the green fields and small houses of a village not too far from Exeter in Devon.

I got used to the silence, wandering the halls of my home, aware of every tiny creak in the stairs, and the noise of bicycle bells from outside the windows. Sitting in my bedroom for hours on end, playing the piano to fill the suffocating emptiness in my chest. It didn't take long to master Beethoven's Für Elise. I started to go out for walks, just to get out of the solitary confinement of the house. Sometimes my friends joined me, and we'd go and muck about outside the local corner shop. Outside was the hustle and bustle of the big city, the honk of horns and the shouts of businessmen in an awful hurry down the street. A complete contrast to the life I lived at home.

Over the course of a few weeks the noises had changed their tones slightly, and the atmosphere around the place took a turn for the worse. Instead of the usual friendly shouts from people across the streets, and the casual conversation that would usually follow suit, there was a sense of tension and urgency about the way people were speaking and moving. The newspaper stands displayed headlines of "GERMANY INVADES POLAND" in bold lettering. We were on the verge of war with Hitler and everyone knew it.

That fateful day I walked past several more newsagents with similar papers before taking a left to the park where I spent many days beneath a willow tree. I had forgotten my copy of 'Death on the Nile' on the kitchen table - in hindsight that was for the best, as I usually completely absorb myself in books, blissfully unaware of anything going on around me. So that day I sat beneath the tree, taking in what was going on. There were children running around chasing each other, but their Mothers not paying much attention as they were talking amongst themselves, no doubt about the current headlines. There was the odd cyclist too, who seemingly came to a halt to join the groups of people

conversing. Across the street, newsagents were taking out radios and crowds were forming on the cobbled pavements

Being the inquisitive person that I am, I wandered over to one of the congregations of people just in time to hear 'Consequently this country is at war with Germany.' I wasn't sure what was going on, but it was enough for me to understand that the situation with Germany had escalated and that this could potentially change my life. A panicked whisper spread through the crowd while I backed away and sprinted home.

I could sense something was different as soon as I stepped over the threshold. There was a smell of freshly brewed tea and the rustle of newspaper coming from the kitchen. I remember thinking that this was unusual and too out of the ordinary to be a good thing. It couldn't be the housekeeper, as the woman had left several hours previously. I didn't even consider taking off my shoes as I passed the coat stand and cautiously stepped into the kitchen, after a moment's hesitation. And there he was. A figure dressed smartly in a military uniform. With the most serious look I had ever seen on his face. My Father. My head was filled with questions I dared not ask. He barely spared me a glance as I paced across the room and filled a glass full of water. There was a feel of uneasiness in the air, like something was wrong.

After what seemed like a century, he set down his newspaper, took off his glasses, cleared his throat and sighed. I could see by his expression that he was fighting with himself over what to say. What could he? We hadn't said a word to each other in weeks and the tension in the air was so thick it could be cut with an axe. A long silence followed. I hate silence. It's so... quiet, so suspenseful. He cleared his throat again.

"Well son, I have been struggling to muster the words to describe the current situation. You will have many questions, and in time they will be answered. But at present, there are some changes that will be occurring with immediate effect in the next four days."

I stared dumbfoundedly at this man, who looked visibly older and more tired than he usually did. The lines under his eyes were deeper, and he bore a wistful expression on his face, as if he was experiencing some regret. It occurred to me that I barely recognise him anymore. His black hair was showing signs of grey and balding, his face showing more lines than I remember, and his eyes had lost their shine. Still unsure of how I was supposed to react to this, I just stared at the floor, shuffling my feet. There were remnants of food from weeks ago still lying there, for nobody seemed to have cleaned the place in a long time, which was unsurprising, considering the housekeeper was consistently absent. My thoughts kept spiralling on in constant chains, so much so that I became startled when he spoke again, with a sigh.

"I regret to inform you that you will be moving to someplace new in the coming days, where I cannot say. It would be awfully good of you to pack a suitcase containing a small number of your belongings, so when the time comes you are prepared to leave. As for me, well... I'm sure it's self-explanatory. The army requires soldiers, so naturally I put myself forward. I hope this isn't too much of a blow to you, being so young."

Still unsure of what to say, I quietly nodded and rose, without a word, to go and pack the dreaded suitcase that lay, gathering dust, beside my rickety bed.