

A Strange New World

By

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He wakes. There is a sea, but no sand. His battered body lies upon a bed of stones and pebbles, thousands of years old. As old as he feels. He lifts himself up to gather some bearings but the fog is too strong. As he lifts his aching head, he holds onto his helmet – the same helmet that has saved his life so many times. He looks for something familiar, something more than the Lee Enfield 0.303 rifle he has had attached to his arm for four long, long years. The chilly mist moistens his unwashed skin as he lifts himself to his feet. He takes one last look to decide which the most logical way to walk is; there appears to be no difference. He walks the way his instinct takes him.

The pebbles crackle and grind under his worn boots; boots that he has worn for four years straight, even though they are a size too small. He squints through the haze to discover thatched roofs. Where he was once tired, now, with curiosity, adrenalin, and the intensity of the fog, he is ready as he will ever be. He lifts his rifle to an attacking position; just in case he has washed up in the enemy's back garden. The sound of many shuffling feet along a pebbled path becomes apparent and the shapes of more and more identical thatched roofs are made clear to him. The air tastes stale and raw. He keeps his breathing to a minimum, to the point at which his pulse is barely beating. He knows the drill; he's done it too many times. He thinks, as he always does when it comes to this point, of his sweetheart back home. Her blue, honest eyes. Her embrace, so genuine. Her heart. Her pure heart. He had wanted to

propose to her for so very long, but decided to wait until this war, this massacre, had ended. He knows when he finally gets the chance, she'll say yes. Of course she'll say yes.

As he treads lightly through the fog towards what now appears to be a small village, he hears no noises except the constant shuffling of lazy feet. It's quiet, too quiet. He sees figures aimlessly walking around, in search of nothing. The smell becomes staler and staler, a smell only found in mass graves. The intense smell is weakening him. He is completely ignored as he strolls through the wandering crowd, engulfed in mist. The local people don't appear to be a threat so he lowers his gun. He takes a more subjective look. Oddly, he sees the people wearing clothes from different periods. Among them he sees a woman in an Elizabethan dress, a man in colourful Egyptian attire and a child in Roman robes. He looks into their eyes and he senses confusion from them all. As if they are all lost; like him. As he wanders through the zombie-like crowd and catches sight of a man wearing a Greek shawl he tries to get some sense from this oddity. How did he get here? What was the last thing he remembered? Going over the top to attack the enemy? Yes, that was it. The whistle was blown and, screaming into the illuminating bullets, he rose from his bunker and...and what?

He now looks and feels as confused as the people around him. He thinks of his sweetheart again. This time though, he senses a distance from her; as if

he's never going to see her. Never going to marry her. It's getting colder. Feeling increasingly drained, something starts itching on the side of his head. He takes off his helmet to scratch it. He places his muddy fingers up to his head and immediately feels a soggy substance. He stares at his fingers with curiosity to find a deep red texture dripping from his hand and into the fog towards the floor. He touches it again. A deep hole is caved into his head. Still confused, he looks at his trusty helmet which, on this occasion, has not been so trusty. The hole piercing through it is bullet sized. He runs his stained fingers around the edge of the hole of his helmet to try and remember. An icy chill makes him shudder as a white wall of fog consumes him. It seems that the more he is remembering, the thicker the fog becomes. In a panicked, last ditch attempt, he opens his mouth to call for help, to call for anything, but nothing comes out. He can't speak. His attempt to shout hurts his injury so he puts his hand over it until he comes across something, something metal. He pulls it out and finds a single, silver, innocent looking bullet. It weighs nothing in his hand, yet feels so heavy. It is this bullet that washed him up on this eternal shore, and into this infinite fog and it is at this point he realises he is alone...indefinitely.