

# “So Now They Are Free”

By Jonathan Padfield

## **ISSUE ONE: “Day Of Infamy”**

*(Ignore that the first part of this is laid out as a book – it’s just that I wrote this bit before I decided to do this as a comic)*

CAPTION: July 1945

She hung up the phone and tried to run, but her legs had turned to jelly. Falling to her knees, scrambling to her feet and nearly tripping over her skirt, Eleanor ran to the front door and opened it. Looking around the scenic American street, Eleanor noticed that some of her neighbours were also standing outside their houses. Mostly wives staring down the road with a mixture of hope and fear, ignoring the summer sun high in the sky; this fact being unable to combat the loneliness and anguish. It was always worse not to know. Eleanor noticed the marked absence of her next door neighbour and best friend, Kate Rybeck. Eleanor had hardly seen Kate since the telegram, she had given up knocking the door or taking round home made meals, it seemed pointless – Eleanor could hear the sobs and maybe she had her own crying to do. But the telephone call had changed all that. Andy McBride was coming home. Her husband was coming back. Eleanor fixed her gaze down that road; not the child riding his bike up and down the street, the birds flitting from tree to tree or the sun glinting off of Mrs Palmer’s glasses would overtake it. Eleanor hadn’t seen Andy for two years, but today was the proverbial day. She would hug him and love him and their marriage would be like it was before the war, before the “day of infamy” took it away. A car turned down the street. Yes, it bore army markings. The car stopped some distance away from Eleanor and a man stepped out, pulling two suit cases from the car. He stood there for a moment, head hung low, the summer breeze irritating the wisps of what was once a neat gentleman’s side parted hair cut. The man took a step forward, heavily limping and visibly wincing every time he put weight on his right leg. The driver of the car exchanged a few words with this soldier, closed the passenger door and drove off. Eleanor was about to ignore this man when she noticed that the forefinger on his right hand was missing, a crude stump pointed away from the other three fingers clutching a case. Moving slowly up his body she noticed that he wore the uniform of an army Major – five purple hearts pinned to his chest amongst other medals. Eleanor knew about this decoration because Andy had always jokingly said that he may have to get shot because it was the only way he was going to win a medal, but the medal wasn’t for getting shot, Charlie had pointed out, it was for surviving afterwards. Eleanor had to examine the man’s face, the lines beneath his eyes aged him prematurely, his right eye was flitting from side to side, taking in all the information it could, examining every last element of the street. There was a huge bandage over the man’s left eye and a scar, visible even from this distance, ran from underneath it and across his nose. Eleanor stared, squinting in the midday sun. Yes, this was Andy McBride. He was only twenty-nine, a lieutenant when he left. He looked forty-nine. The realisation crept over her, but she didn’t want to believe it. Could this man be her husband? The man who had swept her off her feet, even literally when he had carried her over the threshold of their new home? The man grinning in all of her photographs? The joker? But yes it was and no amount of sorrow, shock or wishing would change that. As this clicked into place, Eleanor began to run, calling out. She threw her arms around Andy, nearly knocking him over, which did surprise her. She began to kiss his neck and face, telling him how much she missed him and loved him, all the while aware of him recoiling with pain as each part of his body that she touched disclosed a different wound. Andy remained rigid, his right eye darting around, examining, calculating. The sun reflecting off of his iris, but making no impression on him. The brightness in the sky merely another thing to be taken into account, an obstacle to be overcome. Suddenly he was aware of Eleanor, her hands now on his shoulders as she gazed up at him, saying, “Oh Andy, what have they done to you? But you’ll get better, I’ll help you. I love you.”

“The left eye,” said Andy, “gone.”

“Oh my god! How?”

Andy began to look around once more, “We shouldn’t stand outside like this...”

Eleanor blinked and a tear rolled down her cheek, “no, you’re right. Come in, I’ll get you some lunch,” she stared up at him, still in disbelief, “you’ll be alright, honey.”

Eleanor tried to help Andy, but he snatched his arm away from her, more dragging himself along than walking. As he moved down the street, some of the neighbours tried to welcome him home, even tried to shake his hand, but he ignored them. Trouble was, he didn’t feel welcome anywhere any more. Straight up the garden path of their two story house and into the living room was his plan, once there he briefly surveyed the furniture, which was much as he remembered it. A sofa and two chairs were positioned around a central coffee table; in the bay windows was a wooden table with a wireless set upon it, the other side of the room a bureau with a lamp on it. Some paintings were hung on the walls; a

stand up piano was positioned just inside the door. What really interested Andy was the mantle piece above the central fire place, on it were the pictures that Eleanor kept. Pictures of him in his uniform, him with Charlie, Charlie, him, Kate and Eleanor in a group shot they'd had taken, but all pictures before the war. There were even pictures of his and Eleanor's wedding day and the carriage clock he'd bought her. Andy set down his cases and stared at his severed finger. With that hand – he made sure it was with that hand – he cleared the mantle with one quick swipe. He then bent down and opened one of his cases, from it he produced a Luger. The weapon was fully loaded, but jammed so it wouldn't fire if you pulled the trigger. This problem could be solved with a small amount of maintenance, but Andy hadn't carried this out, he'd been very insistent about keeping the gun as it was. Andy placed the gun on the mantle piece and pointed it towards the larger of the two chairs – his chair.

Eleanor stood in the doorway to the lounge, dumfounded. She ventured forward and asked, "Andy, why did you.....?" Andy grabbed her by the arm and thrust her forward to look at this gun on their mantle piece, he was quite violent and although weak, still stronger than her. Eleanor was only inches from this 'thing' and crying. "You see that?" said Andy. "That's General Aerhardt's Luger..."

Eleanor screamed, Andy span her around and pressed his face close to hers, "do **not** touch it," he growled. Eleanor was scared, up close with that gun and now half a face. This wasn't her husband, he was a kind man and a joker, not a monster. Andy released Eleanor, leaving a three fingered indentation on her arm. Andy sat in his chair and looked at the gun, not returning Eleanor's worried whimpers; she left the room and ran upstairs. "But he'll be alright," she thought. "It was horrible, but he'll adjust. What in God's name did they do to him?..."