

DUST AND SMOKE

1945. In the wake of victory, a chance encounter changes the life of a young man in London.

EXT - LONDON STREET - DAY

A busy London street is lined with excitable people and allied flags. It's 1945 and everyone is dressed in their best clothes. A military parade approaches, to cheers. RAY (22) scans the soldiers intently as they pass, but doesn't see who he is looking for. MARY puts a hand on his arm.

MARY

Don't they all look grand! We're going to get some food in a minute, come!

Ray looks after the soldiers one final time, then allows Mary to pull him out of the crowd.

EXT - MARBLE ARCH UNDERGROUND STATION - EVENING

Ray, Mary, and two other friends stand by the tube entrance.

MARY

Are you sure you're not coming, Ray?

RAY

No, no, I'll stay for the fireworks. You go, I'll catch the late train this evening.

MARY

If you must! We'll see you tomorrow?

RAY

Of course.

Mary hugs Ray, and he waves them off. Ray walks towards a SOLDIER in the middle of a group of people and stops to light a cigarette. He catches the soldier's eye and offers him one.

RAY (CONT'D)

A cigarette for the hero?

The soldier and his friends laugh, they're a little drunk, and the soldier accepts the cigarette.

RAY (CONT'D)

A friend of mine was marching today too, you know, but I couldn't catch him. Don't suppose you know a Charles Morgan?

The soldier shakes his head, but is dragged back into the group by his friend before he can say anything more. Ray smiles and nods his thanks, walks on.

EXT - LONDON SIDE STREET - NIGHT

Ray walks down a quiet side street. At one end, we see more crowds of people standing by the waterfront - Ray stops to scan for Charles. Across the river, a fireworks display begins - he glances at it with a small smile, then looks away and continues to walk.

EXT - LONDON STREET - NIGHT

A vendor is baking potatoes in the coals on an open fire, plumes of smoke rising up into the air. A few people are milling around, talking and eating. Ray buys a potato and sits down on a nearby wall to eat it. A few minutes later, ARTHUR (18) sits down on the wall a little way away from him, also eating.

From a way off, there's a loud bang as an engine starts. Arthur jumps and drops his food. Glances around to see Ray watching him with sympathy.

RAY (CONT'D)

Well I call that bad luck. Those things make quite the noise, don't they.

Arthur nods uncomfortably.

RAY (CONT'D)

Waste of a good dinner though. Would you care to share mine? I dare say I won't finish it.

Ray holds out his plate to Arthur, who looks at Ray for a second before accepting it.

RAY (CONT'D)

Here alone?

ARTHUR

Thank you, you're awfully kind.

(beat)

My parents left a few hours ago. They didn't want to come at all really. But I... well, I wanted to stay. Are you?

RAY

For now, yes. I mean to get ahold of an old friend who should have been in the parade before I go.

Arthur takes a bite, with Ray watching him carefully.

RAY (CONT'D)

So, did you make it out to the front?

ARTHUR

For a while. I only turned 18 a few months ago. My brother was out there though.

RAY

Good man. Did he march today?

ARTHUR

No. He... didn't come back. Took a bullet just after I arrived.

RAY

I'm sorry to hear that.

ARTHUR

Thank you. Ah, what's your name?

RAY

Ray. Johnson. It's a pleasure.

ARTHUR

Arthur Morgan.

Arthur reaches out to shake Ray's extended hand, but Ray is very still.

RAY

Morgan, you say? Any chance you're related to Charles Morgan? 159th, Infantry? Smokes likes a chimney?

ARTHUR

Oh.

(beat)

You knew my brother?

There is a quiet moment. Ray closes his eyes, picking up on the 'knew'. A few seconds pass in silence.

RAY

What happened?

ARTHUR

He... he was shot in the Rhine.
Stomach. He died in the infirmary.

Ray very carefully takes a cigarette out of the packet and looks down at his matches, but doesn't light one.

RAY

I'm very sorry to hear that,
Arthur.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry too. I'm... I'm sorry you
didn't know.

RAY

Oh, that's alright. I never thought
they'd tell me if... well. I don't
tend to get much news from the
front anyway. Stayed behind, you
know. Prison warden.

Arthur looks at Ray for a few seconds, then nods. Gestures towards Ray's cigarettes.

RAY (CONT'D)

Help yourself.

Arthur takes the packet. A group of people walk past, laughing and shouting, drinking from a bottle of rum.

YOUNG MAN

Chin up, fellas! The war's over you
know!

Arthur forces a smile, Ray makes no effort to. Watches the group as they leave, a blank look on his face.

RAY

It feels odd, don't you think?

ARTHUR

What?

RAY

All this celebrating. You'd think
it was the end of all wars, not
just this one.

ARTHUR

You think there'll be another?

RAY

Of course, in time. We simply can't live without them. And there'll always be boys willing to sign up and get themselves killed trying to be men.

Arthur is silent. Ray collects himself.

RAY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, that wasn't called for. Charlie was your brother, and he was no fool. I just...

ARTHUR

No, it's alright. I went out there because of him, you know. He was so proud of being on the front line. I tried to feel the same, but... I never thought I'd see one man die, let alone a dozen in a day. I don't know why he went. I don't know why he wanted me to go too.

RAY

He always was stubborn.
(beat)
I, I don't supposed he mentioned me, at all?

ARTHUR

I'm sorry. He was... important to you?

RAY

Yes, I'd say he was.
(beat)
You know, Arthur, if they start another damned war, don't follow your brother next time. And send my condolences to your family. Tell them Charlie will be missed.

Ray stands up and claps his hand on Arthur's shoulder. Arthur holds out the packet of cigarettes. Ray takes one.

RAY (CONT'D)

I'll take this one for Charlie, you keep the rest. Look after yourself, Arthur.

ARTHUR

You too, Ray. Look me up next time you're in town, will you?

(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

I'd like to talk to someone who
knew Charlie too.

Ray smiles and nods, and walks away into the crowd, leaving Arthur looking after him, turning the cigarettes over in his hands.