

## **“A Wife’s Responsibility”**

*Essay by Octavia Zihan Cao, Branch #142 West Point Grey*

"Oh, goodness, I'm so sorry for you. And your dear children." Her strained smile seemed to be genuine.

What was I supposed to say? I just nodded and smiled weakly, knowing my eyes were red and my cheeks puffy from crying all night. Her husband was off to war as well, but she did not have children to look after.

My three young children barely had an idea of where their father was. All I told them was that their father was away, maybe for a long time. I couldn't bear to tell them what would happen if things went wrong overseas.

My oldest is beautiful Marie, who I think understands the danger around us – but doesn't show it on her face. Then there's my brave Michael, who pretends he's a soldier who has saved the world, and Elizabeth, who doesn't always understand why we sometimes don't get dinner.

Each day is the same as the last. During the day, I trade and hope to buy food from the markets. During the night, I sew together old clothing to prepare for the cold. Marie has come up to me and asked me if we are getting new coats for the winter this year. I couldn't bear to see the look of disappointment on her face, so I forced a smile and said yes. That made her bounce up in joy, and made me sew a little faster.

Every time someone knocks at the door, I always rush to it, hoping for a letter or possibly any news about my husband. It's never the men with news, but today it was different. The men came. They were holding their hats with grieving looks on their faces. My heart sank. I didn't want to hear it. They handed me a note, with scribbled handwriting. I didn't want to touch it. I didn't want to read it. But I did. And in the letter was everything I didn't want to hear. A lot of *I'm sorries*. A lot of promises. But mostly a lot of *I love yous*.

I felt so empty.

I didn't tell my children that the worst had actually happened. I didn't give them any updates, I just acted like everything was fine.

That night, I held my children close to me beside the small, crackling fireplace. I caressed Elizabeth's soft curls as she slept in my arms, my eyes focused on the paper that was now lying in the fire.