

# Bittersweet

by Tanaqui

**1941**

Ray glanced at the empty seat next to him. Last year, he'd driven Danny to nightly shifts at the beet factory, along with the day's final load of beets. This year, Ray was taking half-shifts himself, back home at midnight to snatch a little sleep before heading out again to the fields and the harvest.

And Danny.... Ray touched his jacket pocket, where he carried Danny's latest letter: filled with his brother's excitement of being posted to Hawaii, the island's beauty, pride in his ship....

Ray smiled, not begrudging the empty house or the loss of a pair of hands.

**1942**

Ray's knuckles were white on the wheel as he wrenched the beetbox back onto the rough track, his speed making the truck bounce on the deep ruts. Up ahead, the beet factory's lights loomed, a welcoming beacon in the flat blackness. Another night shoveling washed beets into the slicer, metal teeth mangling the pale flesh like.... Ray pushed the thought away.

If he worked really hard, he'd maybe be tired enough when he got home to sleep a while.

He tried not to think about what he'd do when this year's beet campaign was over, and the snow closed in.

**1943**

"Couldn't keep the farm running without them." Ray didn't look at Matthew Jacobsen as he accepted the canteen of water.

"Not that most knew one end of a beet from the other." Hank chuckled.

"Still don't," Jacobsen sneered. "Filthy, stupid, ignorant Japs...."

"They pick it up quickly enough if you explain it." Ray's fist curled around the handle of his shovel. "Most know other crops well enough."

Jacobsen was still muttering a string of insults.

"I gotta get back to work." Turning away, Ray wondered if it was God's plan those people were here, doing the work Danny should've done.

## 1944

He'd tried. He'd tried so hard to make her happy. Make them a family, at least. Even if she'd never truly be his wife the way he'd hoped.

The letter'd put a stop to any notion of that. She wanted nothing to do with him, that was clear.

Was God testing him: giving with one hand and taking away with the other?

Hank, shoveling beets beside him, hadn't said a word, even though Ray'd said weeks back he planned to stay home this year. Ray supposed Hank'd tell Martha, and Martha—loving sister, loving wife—would do what she could....

## 1945

Ray's shoulders ached, like always after the first shift of the year at the beet factory, as he steered the beetbox up the track. But yellow light spilled warmly from the farmhouse windows, and Livvy'd have hot stew ready—one of the things she'd learned to cook well these past months.

After he'd eaten, and while Livvy cleaned the kitchen, he'd sit a while by Daniel's crib, watching his son sleep. He was getting so big now!

And then Livvy would join him, and they'd fall asleep in each other's arms....

*God's in his Heaven—All's right with the world!*

**Disclaimer:** These stories are [transformative works](#) based on the CBS/Hallmark Hall of Fame movie *The Magic of Ordinary Days*. They were written for entertainment only; the authors do not profit from them. Please do not redistribute elsewhere without author attribution.