

Twenty and a Half Minutes

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He walks along the narrow path, skirting in-between the buildings. He knows that inside, young men and women are dressing in their uniforms and taking up their swords. Most will last the night. After that... he cannot say.

Many on the path are headed toward his destination, the walls that barricade their fort. He eyes their black armor that is lined with red. Just another thing that makes him stand out. He is dressed in the same way, except he wears a white cloak, and white boots and gloves. A sign of peace—except there is nothing peaceful about his abilities. Soldiers peek at him as he passes them, and a few ask him to tell them their fate. Whether they will survive this battle or not. So he takes their arm and glances at their palm. But what he says to each of them is the same:

“Fight with all your spirit, and do not leave this world behind.”

Their faces turn towards him as he walks on, and he knows that they will puzzle over this riddle until it is time to fight. He can't tell what will happen, and he decided long ago that if they die, they might as well go out fighting. But he knows that this time, the soldiers will fight fiercely anyway. There are over 150 refugees living here. It is better than having to die in guilt.

By now he's reached the top of the barricade and walks along the platform. When he stops, it is next to his best friend. The young woman turns, her short blond locks peeking out from beneath a red cap. She smiles, but he takes her arm and turns her palm over.



He can't lose her, not her, not his best and only friend

Twenty and a half minutes.

His breath stops, and he lets her hand slip out of his grasp. The blood pounds in his ears. She is his one friend, the only thing in this world that he truly cares about. He can't lose her, not her, not his best and only friend.

She is oblivious to his distress. “What does it say?” she asks, twirling an arrow in her fingers. He swallows his panic.

“You know I’m not allowed to tell you, Rosamy,” he replies. “Although, ‘fight with all your spirit, and do not leave this world behind’ comes to mind.”

She laughs. It has always amazed him how she can be so cheerful, even on the edge of a battle.

“Well, then, how soon will the fight start?” Rosamy tosses the arrow into the air and catches it by the feather. He closes his eyes. He does not see darkness, but instead the field before them. Now it is filled with the enemy’s warriors, and sounds of battle ring in his ears.

He snaps his eyes open. “In just a few minutes. Maybe even sooner.”

An intense expression slides onto her face. “Then I shall fight until I die, or until the battle is over. Hope to sages my aim is true,” she declares fiercely. There is a scream, and he turns to see a soldier duck as a scarlet-tipped arrow whistles over their heads.

A figure appears on the horizon. Even from here, he can see the flash of sun on silver. Out of the corner of his eyes he notices Rosamy load her bow. A scream reaches him, a war cry so terrifying, he would run if he hadn’t heard it before. Ten arrows thud into the wood. Then the scream is gone, and the lone figure is no longer alone.

The battle has begun.

He yanks his friend out of the way as scarlet flashes by. He glances at her palm, hoping he has beat fate, although he knows twenty and half minutes couldn’t possibly have passed.

Thirteen minutes.

They stand in the center of the wall that faces the opposing force, and he steps up, pushing past their archers. He takes the edges of his cloak in his hands. Then he stretches his arms out. The cloak shields some soldiers, and he knows that they will survive, for no one may fire upon the man in white. That agreement was made five years ago, when his ability was discovered and it was decided that his life was much too precious.

He can see how soon someone will die by looking at their palm. This gift has tormented him for years, ever since he signed up to be a cadet. He knew when his friends would die, and he could do nothing to stop it. That's why he's avoided making new friends. Why the only one he has is Rosamy. Soon, she will be gone too.

The foot soldiers will not spill out of the gates until word is given. He closes his eyes and can see the warriors before them, fighting. A sea of black and silver. He whistles and lifts his eyelids. A white dove appears on his hand. He directs it down, to the fort, then it flies to someone on the paths. He can now hear the gates squeak open. A scream shatters the air, cut short. The first casualty. The sounds of fighting attack his hearing. He ignores them, aware that there is nothing he could have done to stop this. At least most of their soldiers will survive. If the time until death extends past thirty hours, he cannot see it. And many palms he looked at were empty.

But one palm, the one palm that mattered to him, it had only minutes on it. He glances toward Rosamy, who is pulling an arrow back. He can make out the numbers on her hand.

Three minutes.

He glances behind him. There are soldiers herding the refugees into the stone buildings, the only ones that are safe from fire. Wailing rises into the air, and he sees a teenage girl, arguing with someone in red and black. He can barely hear her voice.

“My brother is missing! Can't you find him? He looks just like me, there aren't that many of us, he shouldn't be hard to find!”

He turns back to the battle, his heart stung. He hopes that girl will find her brother, because their parents are probably gone. He looks to Rosamy. And in his peripheral vision, there is a flash of a scarlet feather, headed straight for her heart.

He leaps in front of her, blocking the arrow with his own body.

She kneels, ignoring her bow. Her best friend lies in front of her, and an arrow has pierced his hip. His white glove curls around the shaft. He tries to yank it out, and the white is stained with crimson.

“Joachim.” She whispers his name, and it is so much more than a word. “I should have died. Why did you do this?” But she knows that he did this from love, the kind a brother has. The kind that will make you die, trying to protect.

She takes his wrist in her hand, and there is the faintest beat. Blue swirls out of his arm and swirls around their hands before sinking into her wrist. Two soldiers with a cot have come.

“He’s alive. Please take him to a healer,” she tells them. As they lift Joachim onto the cot, she sees numbers on the back of one soldier’s hand.

34:56. 34:55. 34:54. It’s a countdown.

Suddenly, she understands what her friend meant when he told her about seeing someone’s death. She undoes his cloak’s clasp and affixes it around her neck. Then she stands, casting her weapons aside.

“I am the one who sees Death.”



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