

## Evergreen

That day was the clearest. The stars and beauty of nature had always been shrouded. Smoke, screams, blood, and whatever else war brought upon us caused the sky to dim. I hadn't seen the stars in over five months.

Ever since I left her, I hadn't seen it.

I gnawed on a chicken bone that had become devoid of meat twenty minutes before. My hope for any sort of protein caused the action. The squadron hadn't eaten in two days. We were saving our rations.

Three of the four other guys around me lay on the ground in their own filth. They smoked cigars and played cards. If you'd seen them, you'd have thought we were in some parlor room having a blast. Like fools, they had at the rest of our rations— and whatever whiskey we saved— without hesitation. Their guns were leaned on a tree far from our camp. Their boots were splayed around the fire in a haphazard way. It was a great pain to think of them as my comrades.

The leader of our squad sat beside me with an unlit cigarette hanging off his lips. His rifle was positioned across his lap and his eyes pierced through the night. I never cared to ask his name. He never cared to share. I just called him Joe— because of that one unlit cigarette he always had in his mouth.

"It's 'bout time," he mumbled under his breath. My ears had to strain to pick it up. Of course, I had been used to his hushed voice by then. It'd been two months that we'd been in that camping spot together.

"Time for what? I don't see nothing but what we see every day." And what I said was true.

For two whole months, we'd been positioned across a creek from the enemy. Watching. Waiting. Praying that there would be an opening for a soldier to go in and plant a bomb. The enemy camp was one of their biggest. If we could get a hit in on them, it would be a major turning point in the war. But for two whole months, there had been nothing. Patrols were stationed all around the area and there was absolutely no way someone could just saunter in there with a bomb.

When I was assigned the mission, I had been ecstatic. If we were successful, the war could end. I could see my girl. I could see her beautiful evergreen eyes again. I could see her bright red hair again. *Rosemary*

The war split many people up. We were two of those many people. She lived in the east with her folks. I lived in the west, waiting for her parents to bless us. Ro went back to see them, to ask them if she could stay with me. She never came back. The bloodbath had begun. The line between us had been drawn.

"You hear that, boy?" Joe's eyes frantically examined the terrain across the creek. It was as if he was watching ten events at once. Whatever he heard— or saw— I didn't catch it. He slowly sat his gun on the ground and pulled out a walkie. With a wild smile on his face, he whispered, "That's the sound of a battle."

Joe walked away, while talking on his walkie, with a slight skip in his step. He was probably reporting an opening. I wanted to tell him that he was mad. I wanted to tell him that it was hopeless.

*Clack.* I turned around to look at my fellow comrades. They were passed out, though. *Clack.* The noise seemed far off. As if it was coming from...

My eyes shot across the creek. Soldiers were shuffling in a hurried pace. Many were leaving the camp. *Clack*. Their guns made a racket as they rushed. I couldn't believe my eyes. *An opening.*

Without a second thought, I rushed to Joe. "Sir! Sir! What's going on? They're *leaving*. Why in God's name are they *leaving*?" I was more frazzled than overjoyed, at that moment. There was no way a miracle had come to us. To *me*.

"Because of Shellan, of course! It's become dire over there! They need more troops! Can you believe it, kid? We were sure to lose that city *long* ago! A miracle, I tell ya!" He lit his cigarette.

"We go tonight, kid. We get this over with before anything changes. I've got their uniforms. All we have to do is walk in." He clasped my shoulder and smiled, smoke trailing up from his mouth.

Within minutes, we were dressed as the enemy and walking across the creek to the entrance of their camp. The others were on their way to the right tree line— just in case we needed backup.

We ran at a hurried pace in, as if we were getting ready to go to battle too. With one final glance at each other, we split up. Each of us had two bombs. They were remote control activated. All we had to do was plant them in a secure, hidden spot. Nothing more. Nothing less. I tried to keep my eyes straight and my hands steady. Nerves wracked my body. I didn't want to ruin my chance. I didn't want to fail and never see Ro's smile again. My facade had to be flawless.

The main tent was wide. It was filled to the brim with ammunition and weapons of all kinds. It was my main target.

I sauntered in to "grab to another gun," as I'd told the soldier guarding it. My eyes shot around the tent in search of a spot to put the bomb. There was a dent in the ground on the edge of it, right next to the rifles. It was deep, yet so unnoticeable that you'd barely notice it. I placed the bomb inside, then I grabbed a rifle to cover the action.

*One down.*

The soldier nodded to me and I left. My next hiding spot was the medic section next to it— in a rabbit hole under a bush. And then I was finished.

After a sigh of relief, I turned around to walk out of the camp. A nurse in a hurry bumped into me. She whispered an apology, tucked a strand of auburn hair behind her ear, and shuffled away. My hand reached out to her, but then I shook my head. *It's not her. Snap out of it. Many girls have red hair.*

Just as quickly as I'd come, I'd gone.

Joe sat at our little hideout with a grin. After a ruffle of my brown hair, he spoke again on the walkie-talkie.

He lit another cigarette.

The stars had started to fade. The sounds of the night had begun to only whisper. "Sun's coming up soon, sir."

"Indeed, kid. Indeed." Joe took out a remote. "And that's when we'll make way for our soldiers to come in and massacre 'em."

He blew a puff of smoke.

"What do I do, sir?" My hands were shaking with anticipation. I had to play another part in this. I needed to.

"You go meet the other three at the right tree line. In 10 minutes, I'm pressing this button. Set your watch. You four will go in and help our troops." I nodded and quickly left.

As I trekked along the side of the creek, my thoughts plagued me. Minutes went by and all I thought about was Rosemary. My will was in her. My fight was in her. There was no battle greater than the one raging inside of me. I had to win the war outside to win the one inside. Nothing else mattered. I *would* see her again.

*2 minutes and 20 seconds.*

I had to hurry and get to the guys. Time was running out. Their hiding spot wasn't far though. I walked faster.

My eyes trailed to an opening in the trees, while I went. I could see right into the enemy camp, right where the medic tents were.

*1 minute and 4 seconds.*

A nurse turned around. I stopped in my tracks.

It wasn't the fear that she'd raise alarm. It wasn't the fact that I didn't know what to do. No, it was none of those things.

It was those *eyes*. It was those *evergreen eyes*. They weren't even looking at me. But I could see them clear as day.

I couldn't move.

*34 seconds.*

I couldn't think.

*22 seconds.*

*Rosemary.* My legs started moving. I was walking at a hurried pace towards her.

*14 seconds.*

*Bomb.* She was right next to where I planted it. I frantically started running across the creek.

*10 seconds.*

The water slowed me.

*9 seconds.*

Faster.

*8 seconds.*

Almost there.

*7 seconds.*

"Rosemary!"

*6 seconds.*

She looked at me.

*5 seconds, 4 seconds.*

Her eyes went wide.

*3 seconds, 2 seconds.*

She started running towards me, with a smile.

I smiled back.

*1 second.*

Time stopped.