

Survive
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He Was An Innocent

The boy slid down the muddy slope, landing with a soft thud onto the leaf-drenched forest floor. The frigid air nipped at him, biting at his heels like the rabid dogs that chased him. He ran hard and fast, deeper into the woods. The shadows and trees stretched long and tall above him, what once was home now looked ominous, sinister.

That's what war did.

The low blood curdling howl of the hounds sent an icy chill down his spine, his heart hammering in his chest. Horrific images of what he'd seen the dogs do flashed through his head, the screams of terror. The sickening sound of tearing flesh as they tore their prey limb from limb. His darkly stained sneakers squished against the uneven ground. He was sure that he wouldn't be able to last much longer. He was tired, cold, and afraid. He knew the dogs could smell him, that the monsters chased him. He was an innocent in all this, guilty only of being born under the wrong name. His thoughts were stalled as he skidded to a stop, rocks flying in every direction. He peered over the tumbling edge of the cliff, at its jagged rocks and at the dark choppy waters churning below, crashing and thundering, climbing up the rocks with icy claws.

This place used to be beautiful, but it was like all the color had been drained out of it.

The world was stained grey.

And red.

The deafening sound of gunshots and the hungry roar of dogs made his pulse skyrocket, the boy whipped his head around, envisioning the hounds in front of him. The mist that clung to the air around him forming into horrifying figures. They were foaming at the mouth, a steady dark smile along their

flipped lips. Seeing him not as a little boy, but as prey, just like the soldiers did. They had been taught that anyone who was different, who dared to stand out against the tyrants' rule was a traitor, and deserved to die. A bright beam of moonlight washed over him, his stained red sweater a beacon in the unnatural light.

It wasn't moonlight; it was a headlight.

It all happened too quickly to comprehend.

A steady stream of bullets.

A split-second decision.

The boy turned and, forcing himself not to cry out, jumped off the cliff.

The air whistled by him, the water screamed, threatening, a bomb crashing into an innocent city. He closed his eyes tightly as the world began to blur around him, bracing himself for impact. He hit the icy water with a splash. The cold hit him right in the chest. He gasped for air before he dove below. He plunged under, deeper, praying that his legs would be able to carry him, to propel him forward. The water was as black as tar as the boy swam forward, the rolling waves catching his clothes, pulling him under. Somehow, using all his strength, he reached the waterfall that resided in the distance. Pulling himself through the curtain of streaming water, seeking protection behind its transparent walls.

He forced himself up, pushing back against the stone wall before letting out a choked sob. He tucked his knees up to his chest. Emotions a boy should never feel rocked his body. He was angry, furious at what they had done. He should be home, warm and safe. But instead he was here. Freezing, scared and hunted. He was being hunted like a little white rabbit being chased by a fox, its fur splattered with the blood of his brethren.

No matter the outcome of the war, he would never be safe again.

The boy would always be haunted by the memories of what had been done.

She Was A Traitor

She could hear the steady pelt of rain beating against her steel cage. She tried to remember what it felt like, to be outside, to feel the rain slick against her cheeks, the wind twisting through her hair.

She feared that she would never feel that again.

She forced herself away from the wall, crawling in agony towards the center of the filthy room. The girl watched as a cockroach skittered by her, stalked closely by a spider. At least they'd eat tonight.

She had taken a particularly vicious beating last night. Her back ached from the strains of whips, long narrow cuts criss-crossed along her arms, blood dried and cracked under her unkempt fingernails.

The girl closed her eyes and began to shake. She wondered if the screams of the tortured echoed in their ears, as they did in hers. If late at night they lay awake, thinking of all that they had stolen.

Silent tears slid down her cheeks landing softly on the blood-stained floor. The girl had lost count of how many nights she had suffered here, how long she had endured their torture, their torment, all for the sake of her country; a country that had let her down. She was just another meaningless pawn in an endless, sanguinary war. Her thoughts, her body, they were not her own. She had no rights. They were all free for the taking. She let out another silent sob as she lowered her head to the ground, tucking her knees up to her chest, holding them in her arms. Her red hair splayed around her, she remembered when it was bright, clean, not stained with the suffering and anguish that came with being a victim of war. Her body recoiled in fear as she heard it, she flinched at every footstep. Moving evenly,

determined, towards her cell. She knew what he was going to ask. He asked the same thing every night, as he slid the blade across her skin, as he slapped the whip against her bare back till it was nothing more than broken-down flesh.

On aching feet she stood, her blood boiling over. She was angry. Angry at the men who had taken her, beaten her, but more so at the people who had let them take her.

They hadn't saved her.

And now she had to save herself. She had to tell the truth. She was going to tell them.

She was going to tell them everything.

They would get what was coming to them.

She clutched the metal bars tightly in her trembling hands.

She was ready to be free.

He Was A Soldier

His boots sloshed through the freezing mud, the heavy downpour soaking him, blurring the forest around him. His unit moved slowly but steadily forward. Nothing stopped them, not the rain, the cold or all the things that they'd seen.

That they'd done.

In the beginning he'd been different.

He had still felt the weight of his firearm when it was placed in his hands, had still felt the ache of leaving his family behind. But he was stronger now. He didn't believe in their cause, in his cause. He

found it hard to believe that anyone could. Every other soldier marched around him, wearing their bloody red band like a badge of honor, a symbol of authority, of respect. To him it merely symbolized every life he took, every family he'd torn apart. The world that they had divided. They moved silently, every step measured, calculated. And then in an instant there was a click, and the whole world changed.

Everyone stopped.

Stopped moving.

Stopped breathing.

He turned to gaze at the man who had triggered the land mine. Dressed in the normal garb of a soldier, he looked like everyone else, but it was the fear in his eyes that reminded the man of the boy he used to be. It was the look he had when he'd been drafted. The look he had as his wife had sobbed, clutching her swollen stomach as he walked away from her into an uncertain future. The look he had when he took his first life. The boy looked around at them, his body shaking. Two of his superiors barked something in German. The boy panicked, shouted. We did not have the supplies, nor the time to disable the mine.

The boy was going to be left behind.

The boy was going to die.

We started to move forward, to carry on. The boy cried out, yelling, pleading. As we moved out, his voice became distant, as did his prayers. The blast rocked the ground beneath us, but we didn't stop moving.

The man knew that the chances of him returning home were slim. He knew that he would never see his wife again, never see what type of man his son would become. He was sure that the battlefield would be his grave.

Yet he kept marching forward.

He was a man of duty, a man of honor.

A soldier.

Forever marching forward.

He was not an innocent.
She was not a traitor.
He was not a soldier.
They were survivors.