

Secure

The girl ran. She heard gunshots and the screaming of others surrounding her. The buildings in shambles looked as though they would fall any minute. Her heart raced feeling the hot sweat run down her cheek bone, scraping off of her chin. The weight of the lives she could feel being lost almost making her stumble and fall. Through it all, her short scrawny legs kept their ground, running a steady pace along the cold hard street that had been cracked and baked to a powdering chalk that spurred up into her face every time a loud snap was sounded. The ground shook from the chaos. The small-lightweight girl was caught off guard as a boom was heard across the city, but heard closest to her. Her balance thrown off in an instant, she fell. The girl, her once bright pink jacket laced with purple flowers, was now diminished to a dusty gray color, the blood running from the top of her hairline down to her ear and around to her neck. There was a ringing in her ear as she lay, breathing. People ran by her, their own worries sweeping the thought of a small girl laying on the side of the road away. They thought she was dead; who could blame them? Her small boots enclosing small feet had burn marks from the still burning ashes, her white tights showing dark skin through the holes made by the scraping of the gravel. Blood was around her face, hands and knees.

The girl's silent pain was covered as the guns kept firing into people's chests. Children and mothers hid in their once safe homes, the sunlight drifted in through the dark clouds of smoke with flames still burning like death. This chaos was not going to change because a small girl had fallen from a bomb going off by her. That's not how war works.

Close by the Allies were pushing through the enemy lines. All looked the same-like clones-dressed in their camouflage suits and SODAW-74 machine guns held firmly in two hands,

ready to rain down metal shards of death. They sprinted, crouched down low to the ground. One man fell out of line, being too busy looking at a dog wandering through the shambled buildings. His kind blue eyes wandered, his smooth face looked every which way as his helmet swiveled around side to side, the strap around his chin rubbing his skin raw. "Johnson, back in line!" His sergeant talked to him through the microphone in his helmet, "Jesus, are you trying to die here?!" His voice almost completely drowned out by the guns firing in the background.

"No sir," Noah Johnson replied, his voice tired, his and his troops' eyes had seen too much death in a day than a man should see in a lifetime.

"Good, keep up then!" Johnson kept up. The men ran through a maze of dead bodies and crumbled buildings. Their boots made a crunching noise as they made their way through the crushed up gravel, made from the constant shake of the Earth after each vibration was sent off from a pin being pulled or a wick being lit.

The men and Johnson carefully made their way through the crumbled buildings, placing each step carefully. But soon Johnson noticed something. The shooting had stopped. The shaking ground became still. He stopped, the men behind him ran into him

"Johnson, what the h..". Johnson held up his hand to silence them.

"Listen." He said. The men looked around; their eyes looked around at the silent air that surrounded them. The gray dust particles shone like silver against the sun's rays shining through the smoke. Johnson thought he saw someone laying in the rubble, but before he could think about it the sergeant gathered the troops attention and gave them the hand motion, pointing to a building that was not yet in total shambles.

“We’re going over there to take cover, something doesn’t feel right.” He said whispering. The men nodded and crouched down ready to sprint over. The sergeant led the fast sprint across the open road over to the coverage of the building, the men following close behind, Johnson bringing up the rear. Right as the men came out of their crouched down position the hail of bullet rain closed down on them. The bullets scraped the heels off of their boots. Johnson ran with all his might; the camouflage padding weighing him down, he felt his muscles begin to turn the jelly, the boots making his feet weigh 10 times heavier. As he focused on running, he felt an explosion of pain exert in his lower left calf. The muscle felt on fire, and he fell to the ground, the weight of his padding bringing him to a complete stop on his back in the middle of a bullet frenzy. As he began to lose consciousness, he suddenly felt another explosion of fire in his right arm; he could feel hot blood begin to spread throughout his arm. His eyes blurred. His mind was confused and pain tormented him. He heard a voice over his microphone in his helmet, “Johnson! Holy.. Orly and Andrews go get him before he is shot to shreds!”. As Johnson slipped into unconsciousness he felt four hands pick him up and carry him. He heard the helicopter blades come closer to the ground where he was. Then there was nothing but black.

The girl's eyes opened. Her mouth felt encased in dry blood. The ringing in her ear ceased, although her muscles tensed up at the slightest movement. But still, she sat up. The streets were clear now. The smoke had begun to clear up as the sun broke through the dust touching the broken up stone and rock. Her eyes wandered; her ears began to come to her use again. She could hear the far off bullets showering down. Bombs were going off, but they had moved further away. The girl tried to stand, but the pain in her legs shot up; she winced and looked down. Her once white tights were now covered with dry blood and scabs. She reached out her hand and touched one of her

scrapes, and she winced again. As she reached out her hand, she noticed how scraped up her hands were as well; she made a disgusted and annoyed face. The girl did not like having to deal with all of this blood and pain. She decided to first slowly spread her legs, realizing that they were in a strange tangled up way. As she slowly began to spread her legs, she felt her muscles tensions begin to let loose. She still winced. Once her legs were fully stretched and she could feel her feet again, she decided to try and stand up, round two. She put her scraped up hands to the ground and pushed up; her body weight was lifted and she was soon up on her feet. Her head spun and her legs gave out feeling like lead. She fell against the wall to her left. She collected herself and soon the spinning stopped. The girl regained her strength and pushed off of the wall.

She smiled as she began walking with no dizziness, although she still felt sore. She walked. As she was wandering down the street she heard the screams and yells of men, with the sounds of more and more bullets behind her. She turned around, but then thought otherwise, thinking she would be better off running away from the scary men, just as she had done before her fall. So she ran the opposite way of the men, letting their screams get carried off with the smoke that floated up to the sky.

She walked not even knowing her surroundings. The once glamorous white walled skyscrapers have now been worn out, their bright lighted crystal chandeliers now a part of the dry concrete and dust. The distorted buildings looked down on the girl, and the girl looked up at them. Her eyes had no familiarity as to what part of her city she was in. The once crowded streets with bicycles and street market farmers was now deserted to silence. She moved her eyes to the open road ahead of her. She saw where the concrete dropped off into the desert sand, and decided to go towards it, not really knowing why.

The heat waves came off of the sand as the girl walked. Her lips were chapped with dehydration and her eyes bloodshot with weariness. Her slim boned body was even skinnier now, from the walking and hunger in her stomach. She was exhausted. Her eyes looked down at the sand, her vision was blurry. She looked up, and noticed small white tents in the distance. Thousands of them. She urged her legs to walk faster, but the tiredness of her legs weighed down on her. Her sweat creased into her hair, trickling down into her eyes. She slowed to a slower pace. Her head began to feel heavy and she spun. Her eyes closed to darkness. As she fell, she heard a whirring of an engine, a car maybe? The car stopped by her side, she heard people climb out. She felt herself being lifted into a small air-conditioned space. Her eyes fluttered open to a face of a white woman. Her bright green eyes peered into the girls.

“Hello, I’m Susan. We are going to help you.” The girl hadn’t understood a word Susan had said, but her voice was calm and comforted the girl, so she allowed herself to fall into a deep sleep.

Johnson woke up to sunlight, He lay on a green cot with white blanket sheets that covered him. He looked around. His skin felt dirty still, but he had clean clothes on, an army green shirt with camouflage pants. His mind was still foggy, and was having trouble remembering what had happened. His boots had been taken off and sat neatly by a white door, his socks folded neatly close by. The walls were white, but soon he realized he was not in a building. He was in a tent.

He looked around a bit more, his feathery brown hair brushed up against the white pillow. Eventually he figured he should try and sit up. He sat up, and suddenly the memories and moments flooded into his brain just as quickly as the pain from his arm and leg. He winced and let loose a yowl. A nurse dressed in a turquoise shirt and pants came racing in.

“Hallo? Are you alright?” She had a heavy British accent.

“Huh? Oh yea, yea I’m fine, I just forgot I had been shot in the leg and arm.” He said as he winced and held his hurt arm with the other. The nurse came over to him, and lifted his hurt arm.

“It’s not looking to bad, how does your leg feel?” He looked up at her and noticed she was rather attractive. Her hair was in a loose ponytail, her eyes a dark green.

“Sir?” She said.

“What? Oh, um, it feels alright. It feels tender though.” Johnson winced as she felt around the wound.

“Let’s try walking then.”

The nurse helped put on his socks and boots, and once he was dressed, she helped him walk around the tent.

“Not bad.” she said. “Looks like you’ll be up and about sooner rather than later.” Johnson asked where he was and she replied that he had been sent to a refugee camp to heal.

“Okay.” He said, “Could I take a walk outside?” The nurse nodded and opened the plastic door; the hot air came in as Johnson took a step out.

The sun shone bright into the girl’s eyes. Her eyelashes were dusty with dirt and sand. She looked around the space she had been put in. She still lay, and realized that she felt much better. Her lips were not covered in blood, she had a bandage over her head, and for the first time in a while, her legs and arms didn’t hurt. Her hair was still matted down with sweat and blood, and she was still wearing her torn up clothes. That’s when she noticed she had no jacket. She looked around and saw it draped across the chair across the room. She attempted to get up out of her cot to

go get it. As she got up she was pleasantly surprised that her head did not spin, and her legs did not give out. She smiled, and walked over to retrieve her jacket.

Just as she had put her hand on the jacket, a woman walked through the plastic door, letting in a wave of dry heat. The girl froze with fright, but she stood still. The woman had on light khaki pants with a white t-shirt and a blue button up shirt over it half buttoned. She had a cream colored vest, and had black funny looking shoes. Her hair was up in a bun. Her green eyes looked around the tent, noticed the empty cot, and then the small girl standing in the corner of the tent.

“Hello, I’m Susan.” She said with a kind voice, “I’m not sure if you remember me, but we brought you here to help you.” The little girl hadn’t the slightest idea as to what the woman with funny shoes was saying. But the girl missed her mother and knew that this woman wanted to help her. So the little girl dropped her jacket and walked over to hug the woman. Susan smiled, and hugged back, although a bit confused.

The girl then pulled away and pointed to the plastic door. She wanted to go outside. See if the world had changed from the bomb raided city to the city she once knew. Her parents, her friends, her dog, and even her bed inside her modest home. The woman opened the door, and the girl walked out. Her eyes saw trash blowing in the wind. Thousands of white tents full of people of her skin stretched for miles. She did not see the city of her past; she saw that the nightmare had not ended.

As she looked around she noticed a man with much lighter skin. He had on tan boots with camouflage pants and an army green t-shirt. His short brown feathery hair softly blew in the wind. The man was looking at the little girl, and his kind blue eyes had wonder in them. He thought to himself “What has that girl been through?”.

The girl's eyes were bloodshot, her hair matted down to a dark dark black. Johnson hadn't seen a girl this battered before. He decided to walk up to her.

The girl looked up at the tall man and smiled. Her eyes twinkled as she felt that the man was kind. Out of nowhere, she decided to hug him. Johnson hugged back, feeling the girl's pain in her heart. Johnson pushed her out of his arms and slowly crouched down, still feeling the injury in his leg. He held out his light skinned calloused hand and said,

“Hi, my name is Noah.”

The girl smiled; she had caught onto the lighter skinned people's way of speaking. Then in a raspy voice, struggling to get the words out because she had not spoken for so long, she held out her small tan scraped hand and said,

“Marhabaan (Hi), I am Aaminah.” They shook hands.