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**A Boy with a Dream**

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One day before training, October 16th 1942: Gray of smoke everywhere from the dismay of fighting we humans call war. October is always the scariest month no more dressing up, for Halloween. That’s for little kids I’m almost 19 and a half its time for me to get serious about my life. Regensburg, Bavaria is really quiet at night. All my friends have already left out to war. I guess I’m just a late bloomer; well that’s what my mom tells me anyway. Tomorrow is my first day of training. I'm super nervous because I hear that it’s extremely brutal. I bet your wondering who I’m talking to. I'm actually not talking to anyone, I don’t have any friends since they all left I have been talking to myself, for quite a while now. My name is Adam by the way. It’s getting kind of late I should probably go to bed I have to wake up early tomorrow.

On our way to camp, October 17th 1941: My mom drops me off at the bus station and when the bus arrived I just stand there staring up at it in awes. I just can´t believe it’s my time to go. I just wanted to stay home and have my mama make me some more of her famous Bratkartoffeln. Fried potatoes oh, and how she dices bacon and onions to mix in it. I wish I could just be young forev- “Hey you coming or what!?” someone yelled at me from the bus window interrupting me from my daydream of heaven on earth. I jump back and grab my stuff as I stumble up the stairs of the bus I find someone was sitting in the loner seat but I wanted it because I was going to sleep so I threaten him with my fists and he got right up. I am not even allowed to know where boot camp was in case I decided to try to run away in the night although training is only a week long. I can´t sleep so I started eavesdropping on the two guys in front of me they and they were talking about rumors they have heard about boot camp.

“I heard we have to wake up two in the morning every day, and go for a 20 mile run!” The guy in front said. I knew the twenty miles was an exaggeration, but what does he know. I have never been good at making friends, so I did say anything because I don’t want to start beef with anyone although I knew I could beat him in a fight. Especially because I am a taller guy about six feet, and two inches tall I like to think I have a lot of muscle compared to this guy who is easily five feet, and one inch tall with scrawny arms you can tell he doesn’t work out, although it’s hard to tell while sitting down. It is about lunchtime so we stop and the man in the very front got up he seemed important because his uniform had a whole bunch of pins, ribbons and such on it. He got out some sandwich supplies and told us to make ourselves lunch, and we will get back on the road.

I am in the back of the bus and tired so I am just fine with waiting my turn, which at this point is last. As I am standing in line, another kid comes up behind me and to my surprise, he was a scrawny little kid probably just turned 19 years old. His face was red, and he stood with his hands by his side he didn't say anything he just stood there looking down at his feet. Someone walked by him and brushed his shoulder yet he said sorry to the man. I turned and introduced myself to him.   
“Hi, my name is Adam. What’s yours?” He put his hand up slowly it reminded me of a beaten up stray dog.   
“Hi my name is Achim,” he said with a shaky voice.

“Nice to meet you Achim! Why are you joining the army? I guess it seems kind of absurd why anyone would want to join right now with what’s going on but still.” I ask him with more enthusiasm than needed as we move up the line. I can start to feel how hungry I actually am.   
“Actually I didn’t even want to join it’s my parents. They kicked me out because I am too lazy, and small, they figure that putting me in the army will maybe put some meat on my bones, actually I hope it does I just wish I could try doing that without needing risking my life! Why did you join?”

“Oh, I joined because I just really want to serve, for Hitler; he is just an amazing leader. Also I am eager to shoot a gun! I also just want to get home to meet the love of my life,” Now it is my turn to finally make my sandwich. We ate, and got back on the bus to leave for wherever boot camp is, because I was sitting alone I was able to sleep all the way there. When we got there I woke up to a big loud boom I guess they were training how to throw grenades. We got there kind of late, so it was shocking to me that they were still training which kind of made me nervous, for what’s to come during boot camp. We were all rushed into a little tent where there were small little cots. Everyone rushed to secure their own. As we start to get settled in a man came in and everyone just stopped talking, it is so quiet you could hear a fly land. I had no idea who this man was but everyone else shut up, so I did as well.

“I am General Alban, You all are going to want to get your rest now because there is no telling how much sleep you’re going to get this week,” yelled the General, trying to intimidate us with his voice. As soon as he left everyone started talking again except me, and Achim, because we were smart we went straight to bed. The next morning we are awoken by a loud booming voice as he comes yelling through the tent. “Everybody up! Let’s go! Let’s go! You better be outside the tent dressed, and ready in five minutes.” I was still half asleep so could not tell if it was General Alban, or not but whoever it was we all listened in three minutes tops I was dressed, I think I am ready although I don’t know what I need because I wasn’t quite sure what we had to be ready for.

Outside is still dark, the only light is coming from the lanterns hanging outside the tents. I figured out it was General Albert who woke us up he was standing outside the tent. I didn’t really know whether or not to say hi to him because I didn’t know if I was suppose to even talk, it was just us for a little while though, so it doesn’t seem to be a big deal. As soon as everyone showed up he started jogging no one knew what to do, or where he is going to, so we all just fallowed him. He stayed on the road, for quite some time. He ended up taking us for a six mile run. Some couldn’t do it they fell over to their sides in agony, probably just a side cramp, but they walked themselves back to camp. The rest of that week was just mostly bonding with my group and basic training on what I will need to know for the war because I heard despite the pact with us and the Soviet pact from 1939 Germany is going to launch an invasion against the USSR sometime next year. After boot camp I actually didn’t even go to war yet I had to be a guard at the camp for about a year, this really disappoints me because if I wasn’t actually fighting maybe I could be back home meeting the girl of my dreams. There is nothing I can do, I’m stuck here doing the usual just stopping fights, and mostly keeping things on track, but at least I'm doing some good for my country.

Sunday, August 23, 1942: The battle of Stalingrad had just started, Achim, and I are on the list to go to the battle of Stalingrad. We have grown to be good friends over the year of being guards. We leave, for the battle tomorrow and he is so nervous, but I myself am so ready to shoot someone. We get to go to bed early tonight because we have a long drive to Stalingrad tomorrow. Achim, and I got to talk that night at dinner about life.

“So what do you miss most back home,” I asked Achim

“I miss how on a wet stormy day when it seemed as if there was a leak in the sky we would all sit around a dark quiet room with the radio as loud as it goes listening Mildred Gillars talk in our ear as if we were in the studio with her. What about you Adam? What do you miss?”

“Oh my friend I miss only what I don't have.”

“What do you mean? You have to miss something?”

“You see Achim the only thing I want besides winning this war is a wife with two kids, but now that I’m in the war I don't know if that can ever happen,” I responded with dismay on my face.

“Well, I will get married for you if you can't alight!?” Achim said jokingly.

Early in the morning when the General came in, and yelled to wake up I half opened my eyes and rolled off my bed, got to my knees, and groaned. I sheepishly put all my supplies together and dragged my feet on the ground onto, the bus. As we drive off I watch the sunrise over the crusty old earth. By this time we were all friends, and knew each other pretty well so no one had to sit in the loner seat, and although I could have sat by anyone I choose to sit by my new best friend Achim.

As we get close you can really start to hear the bombs drop and the ground rumble. The air even got thick with smoke it’s almost like you could feel the dismay. I look around the bus, and I could just see everyone’s face get kind of serious also a little nervous. I know my stomach dropped when I saw two planes shooting trying to climb elevation almost like it had flipped the direction of gravity then in a blink of an eye as if it changed its mind it decided to plunge downwards towards the ground with black smoke coming from its back it tries to pull up, but to late it crashes straight into a clock tower. It goes up in flames in an instant. I close my eyes after that, and didn't look up until we pulled up to our stop. When we got to our stop we all had to change our mindset into a hurry up mode. We got our guns and moved on towards the war zone.

Right away I saw the enemy so me and Achim ran and hid behind rubble from a building popping our heads out every now and again to shoot it was so strange how quickly things escalated from sleeping on a bus to shooting another human being. I have so much adrenaline pulsing through my veins I looked over the ruble and shot down two men running towards us like it was no big deal. I actually have a pretty good shot I think as I hit another man right in between the eyes. His body fell to his knees with his eyes still open starring me right in the soul-a flashback from me playing with my mom as a little kid appeared in my eyes and my body went numb. As I shake out of the phase I hear Achim yelling at me for ammo, so I throw him some ammo.

“Let us move around the corner!” I yelled to everyone thinking it was just Achim. They all fallowed though so I cannot complain. After we turned the corner it was pretty much the same thing I had my head tucked under a big slab of concrete and I threw a grenade out towards the enemy and I heard a bomb with a loud scream and I could feel all what my morals used to be shatter for good right there in front of my eyes. Life goes on and you can’t stress on death anymore. I pop my head over and see three men kneeling only about twenty yards away holding up there Tokarev SVT-40, I don’t know what happened but I had to pull under again because I cannot pull the trigger. I even have one of the men right in my crosshairs. I don’t know what happened I would have been able to kill three minutes before this. There is so much dust in the air from all the guns and you could hear gunshots going off from both sides every now and again you would hear a grenade go this whole scene is just chaos and all I was doing is ducking under cover. I wanted to go try to shake off whatever was happening to me to flank around the back so I start maneuvering over and under rubble from buildings when suddenly I come face to face with another man. We just sit there looking at each other as if I my body pulled out of the adrenaline rush and actually realized what I am doing to other humans and disapproving. We just stare at each other in shock like we don’t know what to do. Then we and he both pull out our pistols almost at the same time and we just stand there pointing at each other. I can see pain in his eyes he didn’t want to shoot any more than I did. At that very moment I found out, we are not killers. I just can’t do it.

“Adam, watch out!!” yelled Achim at me as he found me and the enemy just staring at each other. I look down and see that someone had rolled a grenade right under my feet.

My heart stopped, I dropped my weapon and bent down to pick up the grenade.

“Throw it!” yelled Achim. I start to pull my arm back and boom everything went silent. The man with the gun shot me before I could throw it. Milliseconds feel like hours as I lay on the ground looking at the sky as it sounds like bombs and gunshots were miles away waiting for that final explosion. Everything I ever thought rushed through my head.   
“Who will take care of mama? I will never get to wake up on a Sunday morning drink coffee in my recliner and have my wife fill the house with the smell of breakfast. All I wanted was to have a little boy to teach how to throw a ball!”

Then all of a sudden there was just a bright light and everything I ever was or was going to be was obliterated into a single speck of a limp body. Achim had a surge of rage yelling at the top of his lungs he shot down the man who shot me and killed him twenty times over. He then ran to what was left of my body and fell to his knees.

“I'm sorry I should have killed him! I should have killed him earlier,” Achim sobbed.

“I swear on my grave I will find the woman of my life in your honor. I will live the rest of my life in the path of which you taught Me.” he exclaimed to my body as if I can hear him. There is an enemy soldier behind a piece of ruble watching the whole thing he was in shock and you could tell he did not want to be there. The man accidently hit down a rock causing Achim to hear his presence. Achim turned around walked right up to him and shot him still with rage in his heart.

He then went back to the platoon and got under cover. Achim took out about what seemed to be more than half of their men. When he was running in between cover Achim got shot in the leg, a man from his platoon grabbed him and carried him to the doctor’s tent. It was nothing major, nothing some stitches couldn’t fix When Achim got all stitched up a man with a clipboard came in and stood at the foot of his bed.

“Sergeant Achim?” said the man.

“Yeah that’s me” Achim responded. I honestly don't care at this point if it’s bad news because it can't get any worse than killing my best friend, thought Achim.

“The nurse has told me that you won't be able to walk for a long time so we are giving you the option to leave the army. I will be back in a week or two to hear your decision, thank you for your time.” said the man. He left without telling me his name, but I have more to worry about that someone’s name.

About a week later and I am still sitting in this stupid cot, all I can do to pass time is eavesdrop on the nurses talking about how Germany is doing in the battle. Today I heard them talking.

“I’m pretty sure we have pushed the Soviets back into narrow zones along the west bank of the Volga River. I think we will win this one” said one of the nurses.

The other replied “Yeah I heard Hitler rewrote the operational objectives for the campaign, greatly to include the occupation of the city of Stalingrad. So we pretty much got this”

Yeah I hope so I think to myself it’s hard to believe that we were doing so well with all the soldiers coming into the doctor's tents.

About a week later the man came back a he said he would and I decided that I wanted to go home and live my life because after what I saw happen to Adam it scared me and I cannot get that close to someone and have to worry about that. I got home I remember sitting down listening to a talk show about the war about how Germany was retreating only one year in during 1943. I just could not believe that we are surrendering. I couldn’t stop thinking about what life will be like after losing this and how I failed Adam. One thing I did right, to him was about three months into coming home I met the girl of my dreams. She is pregnant with my first kid right now. I am so nervous that I’ll be a bad dad.

The next morning I got to sit in my recliner and sip on my coffee while I listen to **Philippe Henriot** on the radio he is called “Der chef” with my lovely wife Abigail. She is an amazing cook and the smell of her breakfast fills the house. Every day after breakfast we even go for a little walk around our neighborhood and talk to all the neighborhood kids playing in the street about life and staying in school and all that stuff old people are suppose to say to the youth. To this day I go to Adams grave everyday at dusk, I just wish he was here to see me now.

He would have been so proud. Life goes on yet not a moment goes by where I don’t think about how I should have, I could have saved his life. Sometimes life doesn’t give you the second chance you think you deserve. The past can hurt. But the way I see it, you can either run from it or learn from it (Lion King). I have chosen to learn. But that my friend is up to you.