

## A Choice

Cold, brisk, wind nips at my nose. Through squinted eyes, I gaze out onto the grim, war-ridden fields beneath me. The grey clouds loom above my head, the sun hopelessly trying to peek through. Guns fire sporadically followed closely by cries of both pain and anguish. Upon deployment, I was stationed here, on a small mound, just behind enemy camp with the order to kill any unsuspecting enemies. It's cowardice, I know, but fairness and war cannot, and do not, coexist.

I would almost feel snug, nestled up on this hill, if it were not for the gun in my hand. For what feels like hours, I remain perched in the tall grass, like a leopard, ready to pounce at any given moment. Eventually, I seek solitude in my thoughts. I think back to the times my friends and I would run around and pretend to shoot each other, oblivious to the fact that one day, we would be firing real guns with real consequences. For a split second, a thought pops into my mind. *If it comes to it- Will I pull the trigger?* I am quick to dismiss it. Thoughts like that will only result in hesitation. Hesitation will only result in death.

My ears prick up as I hear someone whistling a joyful tune. I struggle to place where it's coming from, so I point my gun out into the fog blindly, my finger lingering over the trigger. Through the mist, a man appears. He is fashioned with a muddy, button up shirt, and bears the enemy's crest on his left arm. I stare at it with bitter distaste and train my gun to his head. *He will feel no pain.* The man, early twenties I presume, reaches for his pocket and pulls out a photograph. I squint my eyes and make out two figures. His parents.

“I’ll be home soon guys, I promise,” the man says shakily as he puts it away.

A pang of guilt shoots into my chest like a bullet and it feels as if my gun has grown heavier. With a shudder, I fight off the goosebumps crawling up my neck and cock my pistol.

*Hesitation will only result in death.*

The sentence repeats itself, over and over again in my mind. It is only one death amidst tens of thousands, but deep down I know it is more than that. One family left distraught, one broken promise and one memory that may plague my dreams and fuel my nightmares.

Calmly I lower my gun, slowly rise to my feet and back away, one step at a time. I am almost out of sight when a branch breaks beneath my feet. My heart stops. The man looks up, drawing his gun. It is kill or be killed. Shaking, I drop mine and stare deep into his crystal blue eyes, in hope he drops his too. He doesn’t.

“I’m sorry,” he mutters.