# Paths of Clover

## Arts and Literary Magazine

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Life of a Survivor
Aleah Greene

A vague remembrance of both how and what things once were are unorderly depicted in a clustered form in my mind. An agglomeration of pieces scattered about like a puzzle. A puzzle that oftentimes seems obscure and unsolvable. However, I can still recall her sweet face, so beautiful. Her eyes, a luminescent jade green. Her beautiful lustrous head of brunette hair that came to her waist. Glance at my queen. My love of over sixty years. With the same sparkle in her eyes, although her hair has transformed into a thinly worn silver. My dear Kat. In awe of how we have managed to conquer what people only dream of conquering. Life. Despite our age, she still finds just enough time to badger me about being punctual.

“Les, you old fool, where’s your socks? The students will be interviewing us in an hour. We must leave soon, dear, if we don’t want to be late.”

These old bones just aren’t what they used to be, and quite frankly neither is my mind. Where did I put my socks? Ahhh, in the drawer upstairs.

“Who you calling old fool! I still got it.” I wink.

She snickers softly at my remark. I carefully walk up the stairs, down the hallway, and into our bedroom. All four walls completely bombarded with photographs of our children and our children’s children. I’m rummaging through the dresser in search of a decent pair of socks. But just as I reach into the far-left corner in the back of the drawer, something cold and solid brushes up against my knuckles. I’m wondering what this object is. Then I hear Kat calling me.

“Les! Dear, have you found your socks yet?”

“Be right down, honey,” I manage to say while still entranced at my newfound discovery. It seems to be some sort of ancient miniature chest made of a beautiful cherry-maple wood. I’m rummaging through the dresser in search of a decent pair of socks. But just as I reach into the far-left corner in the back of the drawer, something cold and solid brushes up against my knuckles. I’m wondering what this object is. Then I hear Kat calling me.

“Les! Dear, have you found your socks yet?”

“I’m in a whirlwind, lost, and there’s no going back. Time traveling. Suddenly all the pieces to the puzzle are in place.

The year is 1950. And I have married the love of my life. Mr. Arthur Lesnik Brozek and Mrs. Katarzina Ania Brozek. I wake up every single day grateful to be alive and grateful to have her by my side. We survived something so great. Our spirits have come together to produce our angel that grew safe inside the inner depths of her womb. A part of us that will live on. A part of us that will know our true survival story. We’ve been liberated and the transition was challenging. I have gone from freedom to shackles back to freedom again. But are we truly free? I’ll never be free from what I have experienced.

What we have endured is forever engrained in who we are today and who I’ll be fifty years from now. I look into the eyes of my son. So innocent and so pure. I see myself, who I once was. I remember like it was yesterday. Overnight, life has gone from peace and serenity to chaos and confusion. No one really knew what was actually going on since it was all happening so fast. I was scared. No. Terrified. These men who appeared to be soldiers claimed we were in danger and that they were going to take us all to safety. But safe is the last thing any of us felt. We were thrown into a cramped train, almost suffocating. Immobile, with hundreds of us packed like sardines. You could hear the mothers desperately trying to console their wailing babies. Finally we stopped and there was complete silence. Our hearts pounded, not knowing what awaited us on the other side of the door. Then there was this incredibly bright light. We’d arrived to an unfamiliar destination. Men in uniform with a swastika sewn on their front jacket pocket to be seen by all yelled for us to hurry outside.

“Get out! Now! All of you!”

I squinted my eyes for just a few seconds since I had not been exposed to light for what felt like years. A man grabbed me by my shirt collar to make me move a bit quicker. We were standing in the cold, but all I could think about was my family. But they were nowhere in sight. All I could see surrounding us was
barbed wire and soldiers barricaded around us with guns in their hands. They were the predator, and we were their prey. I had initially thought the guns were just a ploy in order to scare people, but I was very quickly proven wrong. Anyone to challenge their unlimited authority was destroyed for all to see. This would serve as an example for us all not to step out of line. We were told to strip down to our pale bare flesh. The cold jabbed our fearful bodies like freshly sharpened knives. I spotted my mother and brother walking in a line opposite me. I ran towards them. The German police yanked my hand, but my mom whispered to me “Go! You are going to live. You must live.” That was the last time I would see them. Those were the last words my mother would ever speak to me.

Conditions in the concentration camps were inhumane. The smell of urine in the small bunks where we resided. The infestation of lice that would eat away at our skin. Stale bread and a few ounces of soup was what our diet consisted of. Many developed typhus fever and died. There were numerous gas chambers. The monsters would put people in and release a cycle of poisonous gas killing everyone in a three-to-four-minute time span. The putrid odor was oftentimes unbearable. The smell of burning babies’ flesh would linger in the air. How could they deliberately commit these unnatural sins against us? All the while they went about praising the Devil himself.

“All hail, Hitler!” protruded from their very mouths.

But when all else failed, I knew there was something more to come. Something great. Something honorable and just. I did not blame God for what was happening. I pitied these men who were not brought up and raised to love the way I was. I was taught that people are wonderful. That people are good and that people wouldn’t hurt anybody. But the reality is that those morals are not in the slightest bit evident here.

Then the Russians came and we were liberated. But what would we do now. No money, no food, and no clothes other than the blue-striped pajamas we’d been forced to wear every day. I had to start new with a fresh clean slate. Then I saw her. From the moment I came saving her from the man with the big stiletto, I knew we’d spend the rest of our lives together. She had lived my story. She understood me better than anybody. The best thing I could have done was marry that woman. At night she’d moan and scream in her sleep, haunted by the cruel face years ago. Nightmares took over her dreams, but I was there to comfort her. Now I look into the eyes of our son. I see myself. Not who I once was. Who I am. Who I always will be. I had a beautiful picture of my family that I had managed to keep with me throughout all these years. They are and always will a part of me. I hold that torn photo between my fingers and I hear Kat calling me once again.

“Les, dear? Any luck with those socks?” I place the picture back in the small chest, with tear-filled eyes. I grab the socks, close the drawer, and wipe my eyes free from the tears. I go downstairs and kiss my Kat on the forehead.

“Yes, I have them. Let’s get ready to go.”
The Barrier
Jessica Mulles, Nina Swanson, Wendy Allen, Agata Blaszkow
Life of the Brave
Grace Sconzo

Today is the coldest it’s been yet. The forest is so thick, and the snow is so deep, just about up to my knees. It’s been this way for about a week now. The fog is so thick you can’t see in front of you. You can hear the Germans within standing distances, but you can’t see them. It is so cold that when our men die, you can’t pry the rifle from their hands. Although it does help to keep them preserved for a proper burial.

My feet are starting to turn black, and I can’t really feel them anymore.

A lot of men have been taken by what we call trench foot or frozen feet so I decide to go find somewhere to sit for a minute to give my feet rest. As I walk I see a fellow second-ranger battalion, so I go sit down next to him on a log. He has red hair, is well built, and has on a giant wool coat with brand-new boots.

“Want a cigar?” he asks me in a scruffy voice.


He hands me the cigar from his coat pocket and lights it for me. We sit in silence for a minute puffing on smoke.

“What’s your name kid?” he asks me.

“Brian,” I answer back. “What’s your name?”

“Brandon, Brandon Roberts,” He says back with a deep voice. “What’s wrong with your feet, kid?” he asks already knowing the answer.

“Frozen feet. They are already turning black. My boots and socks are so old. They are dirty and have holes in them so snow goes right through,” I reply back in pain.

Brian looks down and back up at me. He looks over at me and asks “Son, what size shoe are you wearing?”

I told him I wore a size thirteen.

He says, “I’ll tell you what, you take your shoes off.” He was just issued what we called ice packs. They are a rubber-vinyl type of shoe. Real warm on the inside. He starts taking them off, and he also takes his socks off.

“Here, switch with me,” he says while holding his clean, new boots and socks.

I sit there for a second in shock. This, what appeared to be giant, scary marine is giving up his warmth in the middle of the harsh winter. “Oh…okay.

“Thank you, sir, thank you so much.” We switch boots and socks, and then we stand up and shake hands.

“God bless you, kid.”

That’s something I’ll never forget. It’s a shame because I probably won’t see him again.

We have a lot of disadvantages here. They are better prepared than us because they know every inch of the land. We just see a whole lot of forest and snow. They have white camo and skis. They also have overcoats and overshoes. We have nothing to protect us; we had no idea how cold it was going to be.

We have had to go into houses and “liberate.” When we liberate we take their sheets and pillowcases; anything that is white and can help us blend in. No one really gives us a hard time though. Sometimes the houses are empty. That’s because the Germans make them evacuate so they can use them as fortresses. Our hand-to-hand combat is mostly in little towns like Schmidt or Kesternich or San Moritz. No one could take Schmidt. We were the only ones who could. We would walk around ten blocks in the snow to get where we had to go. We
couldn’t stop. All we could do was fight. This was when frozen foot took most of our men.

When we enter towns we have to put up signs saying, “Now entering Schmidt, through the courtesy of the 78th Infantry Division.” It’s never a lot of men going in to attack. Just small groups. My division has three battle stars, which I am pretty proud of. They are Arden, Central Europe, and Rhineland.

The Germans put observers on top of steeples then call in their artilleries. That is always a surprise. We usually have to go in and liberate the steeples before they can get to us. We knock doors down and throw grenade after grenade before we walk in. Typically we carry around ten grenades with us. That is our best weapon besides the M1 rifle.

We have one sergeant, Sergeant Will. We trained him in the states. I had AP training with him, when we saw one of the kids go out into the minefield and get blown up. The poor kid was just crying for help. Nobody could go out to help him, so we all just had to watch and listen. Everyone was too scared to go out there to get him, but Will was the only one brave enough to go get him. He crawled on his belly and brought him back. The kid was already dead though. After that everyone loved Will. I’m not sure what kind of a medal he got, but I know he got one.

One thing that keeps me sane through the Battle of the Bulge is letters from home. The government is good at getting us our mail. They find us wherever we are and get them to us. I write to my family to convince them I’m safe and keep them happy. At the same time I am kind of trying to convince myself the same. My family writes back, and it is typically anything to take my mind off of the war.

I never once regret going to war. That’s what I was trained to do. There is no regret in fighting for your country. I am happy to be avenging the Germans for what they did to the Jews, and on top of that, for what they did to my men. Sometimes, the SS would just gun us down and kill us. Most men thought they were being taken to camps, but they were just being killed. No mercy or anything; it was just death. The SS are just gangsters. They can’t deny that they are the SS because Hitler has tattooed it on their shoulders. Every time we have captured a prisoner, maybe not an SS, they would say Nix Nazi. Which means, “We were forced to do this, we are not Nazis.”

Hitler even has kids around the ages of fourteen to fifteen fighting the war. No one really knew how bad things really were. No one was really aware of death camps and ghettos. Hitler has used up everyone he possibly could. He loses more and more soldiers as the war goes on. He uses everyone he can until they are dead. Everyone and everything. He doesn’t care how old they are. That only gave us motivation to keep fighting though. One thing that is different from us and the Germans is our loyalty. When we lose a platoon leader, we train for about a day than just take over. We move on, they can’t. The Germans just give up when they lose their leaders. They don’t know what to do. See, they are fighting because they don’t know anything else, but us, we are fighting because we have American ingenuity.

One thing I am very excited to be able to bring back with me is a pistol. They are letting me mail that back home. If you have a pistol on you, you probably killed a German to get it. I took mine off an SS colonel somewhere around the Rhine River area. I took it from him when we captured him. It was a 9-mm pistol. A real beautiful-looking thing. If you take the holster out and attach it to the back of the gun, it would shoot like a machine gun. I also have daggers and bandannas, and a flag. I didn’t kill most of the people to get these things though. I got them when we went into houses to protect ourselves. Just wanted something to remind me of what I have done.

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The war is finally over. The best feeling is finally being able to relax with my wife in the house I built for us. I’m not sure where I would be without my wife. We have been married for sixty years now. We only knew each other for about six months before I went to war. It was hard, but I knew she was the one I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. We wrote letters back and forth the whole time. She even made a book of all our letters for our sixtieth anniversary on January fourth. I take her to the veteran parades we have here every month. I can proudly say I have lived a life most people will never be able to experience, and I wouldn’t have it any other way.
When it comes to war, there are no days off. There are no breaks, just war, war, and more war. I never got any time off, I barely had any time to think for myself. It got really tough during the holidays. My mind was always thinking about what other things I could be doing instead of this war. Thinking how I should be walking down the steps on Christmas morning, but nope, I was walking down the steps of my base with all of the other soldiers. I didn’t get to eat Christmas dinner with my family. It was not fair. I missed them all so much, they were the reason that I kept pushing forward every day. I kept hearing my brother Jack’s voice, “Don’t worry, Barry, I’ll see you when you get home.”

I know that twelve-year-old kid was always watching out for me. I did everything I could to stay alert and alive just to make sure I saw him again. The war wasn’t all bad though. I made some amazing friends while I was there. We were a group of three, pretty much like the troublemakers of the platoon. There was Evan Mick, we called him Mini because he was the smallest out of the group. Then there was Ricky Thomas, he didn’t have a nickname, just Ricky. They were the best two buds anyone could ask for. They did make the war a little better, but war was still war.

Every single day Ricky, Mini, and myself would be sent out onto the battlefields forced to fight for our lives. Each of us was strapped with at least three guns, of course the M4 carbine and then two other sidearms. It was always funny seeing Mini struggle to walk around with all the things he had to carry, which added up to his body weight. He was quite the complainer, always asking, “Hey guys, could one of you take one of my guns?”

Of course, the answer would always be, “Hell no, stop being a little sissy.”

We never really meant it. That’s just how guys bond. If you are friends with another guy and aren’t always trying to prove your male dominance by making fun of or trying to overpower the other guy, you aren’t really friends. The journey we usually had to travel was about a ten-mile walk just to inspect the area around us, pretty much like a watch team. In this certain time, it was wintertime so it was always really cold, and Ricky would always say to me, “If we get stranded out here with no food, I bet little Mini over there would taste pretty good grilled.”

He would always say it just loud enough for Mini to hear it, and then he would always have one of his little-man temper tantrums. “I hate you guys. I could easily kill both of you. Y’all are both jerks.” And that would be our entertainment for the day. We would both get a good laugh out of that. Things would get serious at times though. We’d been in a couple of gunfights with the Japs. One, I do not remember the exact date, but I do...
know that it was wintertime, but it was getting warmer to the point where we did not have to wear our big heavy jackets and such. During this time, the boys and I went on with our daily routine, but something wasn’t right.

“Something isn’t right,” said Ricky.

Now Ricky was usually the joker of the group. So of course we just played it off because we thought he was kidding as usual. But then I got this really strange feeling in my chest, so I agreed with Ricky.

“Yeah, I agree with you guys, it feels like we’re being watched or something,” said Mini.

“I think we should take a different passage today, fellas,” I told them.

So we went on with our journey, and it was about halfway through and nothing weird had happened yet and I could see it on both of their faces that they were relieved for the most part. It was just a feeling you have when you’re close with friends that you can tell when something is out of the ordinary, and we were all acting, well, scared.

“Would Captain be mad if we came back a little early today?” asked Mini.

Now I know we were all thinking the same thing, but Mini was like the baby of the group and Ricky and I couldn’t show any fear around him or he would lose it.

“Nothing’s wrong, Mini, it’s just any other day,” said Ricky.

And maybe not even two seconds after Ricky said that we heard the one thing all of us had been expecting all day. The gunshot. Now I’ve heard gunshots before, I mean come on I was a soldier. But not any shots like this. These were louder. They were aimed to kill and not only to kill, but to kill us.

I knew Ricky was gonna be all right in this situation. It was Mini I was more worried about; I was more worried about him than me. After I heard the first shot I looked over to Mini and he was frozen, he’d forgotten all his training, all the practice in the one moment in a blink of an eye. I knew I had to act fast to save the little guy, so I did what anyone else would’ve done to protect their best friend. I ran over to him and tackled him into cover.

“You need to get your crap together right now! We will get out of here,” I said to Mini. I could see the fear in his eyes.

“Just follow me and we will get out of here.” I continued to try to get Mini to man up.

Good thing we knew that area like the back of our hands. We knew how to get behind the attackers, without them seeing us. Ricky signaled for us to come his way. When we finally regrouped, you know after that we killed them suckers.. bang, bang, bang. Down they went, just like sacks of potatoes.
Over The Years
Grace Herrick
“I need you guys to sign something for me.” My mom and dad were sitting in the living room watching television, and I had just come home from my friend Jake’s house.

“What is it?” my mother asked.

“It’s a…” I pulled the form out of my back pocket, and before I could even finish my sentence my dad interrupted.

“No!” he shouted across the living room.

“But Dad, you don’t even know what this is yet.”

“I know exactly what that piece of paper is. I refuse to sign it and don’t you dare ask me again!” He was shouting so loud. His face turned bright red. My little sister, Carrie, came running down from her room.

“What’s going on? Dad why are you yelling?” she looked frightened.

“It’s okay Carrie just go upstairs to your room.” I said to her.

“No, tell me what’s going on!” she demanded.

“Didn’t you hear him Carrie, go to your damn room!” My dad shouted in extreme rage. “Don’t talk to her like that! She’s just a kid. She doesn’t know any better. Don’t take your anger out on her.” I cannot even take the thought of someone yelling at my little sister.

“I’m going to go downstairs now and see if dad has calmed down yet. You sit here and read okay.”

“Yeah, yeah okay.” she responded.

I went downstairs. Dad was sitting on the couch, and Mom had her arms around his shoulders, telling him to calm down and keep taking deep breaths. Maybe I should wait until dad was completely calmed down, and then talk to him about it again. But then again, what is the point of waiting until he’s calm? He’s just going to get mad all over again, and start yelling, and throwing things around. My mom saw me standing at the stairs, and she shook her head signaling me not to start this again.

She got up and walked to the kitchen. I felt as though she wanted me to follow her. I went into the kitchen. Mom was standing by the counter.

“Don’t do this, Sam.” She whispered so that my dad couldn’t hear in the living room.

“What is the big deal mom? All of my friends are doing it. Why can’t I?”

“Just because your friends are doesn’t mean you have to do it too. You’re not cut out for this. I’m your mother I would know.”

“Mom come on, I just don’t see what the big issue is.”

“The issue is that I don’t want to lose my only son!” my dad barged in the kitchen.

“Dad just calm down and think about it. I’m not asking for much. I just need your signature.”

“Look Sam we didn’t raise you to be this big so you can just go to war and die. We want you to experience life. Have your own family, a wife, children, maybe even grandchildren. Don’t you want that? Don’t you think about us? What will we do if, God forbid, something happens to you? Don’t you love us son?”

“I’m doing this for love, Dad. For the love of this country. To protect my family that I love more than anything else. To protect my family’s freedoms.” I responded. At this point my mom is standing quietly with tears falling down her face not able to even say a word.

“Since when did you develop such a love for this country and its freedoms?” my dad screamed in rage.

“All my friends are going. It’s not as bad as you think. And this could be my chance to finally prove myself.”

“Prove yourself? Prove yourself to whom? You have never talked like this before.
I just don't understand. If not us at least think about Carrie.” I couldn't even respond to my dad. He gave me a disgusted look and walked out of the kitchen still yelling about how selfish I am.

My mom and I were the only two in the kitchen now. A silence took over the room. I hadn't thought about that. How was I going to stay without seeing my little sister? Maybe my parents are right. I don't think I'm ready to leave my family. At least not Carrie. I can't believe I hadn't thought this through. But then again I'm going to have to leave my family one day, I can't always be with them. Carrie is going to have to learn how to be on her own too. I can't just keep babying her like this. No matter what Mom and Dad say my decision is already made. I'm tired of being a nobody. I want to join the army. I want to do something important for this country and that was final.

My mom walked up to me, now standing directly in front of me, she put her hand on my cheek, and like every other time she did that all my worries went away. She looked me right in the eyes and said,

“If this is what you really want,” then she took a big sigh and just walked out of the kitchen.

I stood there trying to comprehend what the hell just happened. When I finally came back to my senses I walked out to the living room. No one was there. I put the paper down on the coffee table and went to my room. I could hear Mom and Dad arguing about something, but I couldn't exactly make out what they were saying.

That night I didn't even get a second of sleep. I was tossing and turning the whole night. The only thing that was on my mind was whether or not I will be able to go to the army or not. Was I emotionally ready for this? I couldn't decide but one thing that I did know was that it's either now or never.

The next morning I got out of bed and went downstairs. No one was downstairs yet. I went and sat on the living room couch and just stared at the folded up piece of paper.

I should just forget it. What was the big deal anyways? It just wasn't worth hurting my family so much. I went to grab the paper to rip it up when I noticed something on the paper. My jaw just dropped. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. There it was with both my parents’ signature.

The Journey
Bailey Barber
Cry About It Later
Patrick Overby

The sudden slam as the tracks go over a dip brings me back to reality. No longer was I resting on the farm just outside South Bend in the summer, but back in a tank in the middle of Germany in winter. The creaking of the gears, the odor of the oil running through the engine. It would probably be chilly if it wasn’t for the heat radiating off the engine like the rays from the sun. The constant rolling and pitching as we crawled over all the minimal cracks and bumps on the German road, making them seem like the trails through the mountains that my ancestors would take their stock on back in their home country.

“Hey Zoltan,” Captain barks out, breaking the vocal abstinence of our metal coffin, “are you here?” As I’m about to reply to the seemingly simple question, a loud crack and lurch in our track. Only a lurch. Damn, Jack is good. Any other driver and we would have probably capsized.

“FIRE, FIRE, GET THE HELL OUT,” someone is screaming, their voice reverberating between the walls, masking the voice of who is screaming. I’m getting up and I see it, one of our guys reloading a bazooka. He’s aiming at us. Jesus, he’s a Gerry. I can’t think, just do. Grab the .30 and feel it toward him, just a squeeze, a stream of accelerated molten lead slams into his body. He just collapses. Like a sack of potatoes my mom would drop at the farmer’s market. No dancing, just dropping like dead weight. No pun intended. “Jesus, Zoltan, get the Hell out.” Captain is screaming now.

I’m clambering to the outside. The shock of cold, the sting of sideways sleet pounding into you like a pissed-off horde of wasps. “Zoltan, you dumb piece of crap, you forgot your helmet.” Captain is always screaming it seems even as he’s dumping my helmet at the farmer’s market. No dancing, just dropping like dead weight. No pun intended. “Jesus, Zoltan, get the Hell out.” Captain is screaming now.

We were zeroed in by the bastards. Searching now for new cover. There! The treeline. We could scatter in there, and they would have a harder time getting us. Another explosion less than fifteen feet from us makes our decision on when to move. We spread out and bolt for the bushes.

Another explosion hits right where we just were. I get thrown by the blast. Get up, you don’t need a clear head, just need to get to cover. It’s right there, less than twenty yards. Pumping my arms, reaching, grabbing for the distance. My legs turned to pistons, punching into the ground; mud, gravel, dirt, and grass fly as mortars impact and detonate around me. You hear a whistle first. Then it hits you. The ground’s blowing away beneath my feet. Flying now. Feels like an eternity. Stomach in my throat. My dinner is coming up with it. The impact doesn’t hurt as much as you would think. Getting up does though.

Checking myself. No new major holes in me. The only other problem besides a few cracked ribs is that my right boot flew off to God knows where in the explosion.

“Damn it, Zoltan,” the harsh battlefield bark of Captain breaks through the ringing of my ears and my concentration of me woes, “you’re lucky you didn’t fly an extra foot.” Only then do I examine my surroundings. Not seven inches from where I landed is an old abandoned plough. One that had been left awhile ago. A bit of shine is still on the frame, the rest is rust, the back end sunk into the ground, it had broken up moments before its owner had discarded it, most likely running for safety. Old weeds and dirt caught up in the gaps making it look like another brush pile only added to why nobody saw it before. If I had slid any farther, most likely I would have split my head on the still-lethal blade.

“Jesus Christ on crutches without a cast!”

“What’s the matter Fekete, were you hearing the angel’s song just now?”

Jack is just walking up like he’s pacing off his own property back at home. Why the hell is the driver so damned cocky? He’s not in the tank anymore, why is he still walking as
if he’s armor-plated. Any normal person would be scurrying, trying to get to cover and make himself a smaller target. He’s walking as if he’s with his girl in the middle of Central damn Park. He doesn’t even have his firearm with him.

It seems as if I’m not the only one to notice this. Captain just about explodes on him. The whole time he’s just standing there with the same cocky smirk plastered on his face. After the vulgar tirade that I wouldn’t believe could come out of anyone that kissed their mother, Jack bursts out laughing.

He’s laughing now, why is he laughing at a time like this? “Captain,” he finally wheezes out in between his guffaws, “Captain, Captain,” he’s finally regaining his composure, “I radioed in to them, they won’t be firing on this position anymore. They think we’ve been blown up.”

Only then do I notice that the hell sounds are farther away. “Couldn’t even tell me apart. That’s what I call validification of schooling. Being able to talk to Gerry myself without a hitch. I’m going to have to go back home and kiss Mr. Grimm on the lips.”

“Damn, Jack, if that didn’t work and we survived, I would have killed you myself.” Captain blasts him.

“Lucky it worked then.”

“You sure are.”

“Hey, Captain, Jack, shouldn’t we still be trying to get shelter?”

By that remark, we gather with the rest of the tank crew and double-time our way to the nearest town. We only have to wait til 0330 the next morning for allies to come in where we joined back in. One of the engineer groups soon venture out and towed the crippled carcass that used to be our tank. For us to repair, of course.

For these two weeks, the locals treat us to one of the best receptions I ever experienced. We all gain an extra inch on our waistlines from the baker, who was very appreciative. On one of the first days of repairs during a break, it seems like the whole town shows up to thank us. One kid gives me a letter. It is all in French, I can’t read it but I send it home to save for later. One guy shoves a cigar into my mouth, and a bottle of some special kind of spirits into my hand. I appreciate the gesture, but I am sitting right on top of the fuel tank. I have to barrel my way through the throng of locals so I don’t blow everybody up. It’s one hell of a cigar though. Almost worth the dirty looks from mothers I just pushed over.

After the two weeks of repair and respite are over, we receive our next orders. We are to start heading towards Menden. I know close to nothing about it. Just that it’s in Germany and that we have to cross the Rhine to get there. The trip there for the most part is uneventful. We mainly use the mighty-fine highway system that Adolph built. It isn’t until we got to the Rhine that anything really happens.

“A new order just came in.” Captain’s voice projects across the group clearly. For once it seems like he isn’t yelling from anger or stress. Just giving a message to the group.

“We’re to, pretty much, be portable radio stations for coordinating the people crossing the bridge. A whole lot easier than biting the Gerries in the butt and running off, if you ask me. Our guys just died for this bridge, we better do a good job making sure it’s put to good use by the right people.”

It is all going fine, moving people along at a steady pace, making sure no Gerries are attacking us. Scanning the landscape, nothing. What’s that in the water? Black lumps just drifting toward the bridge. They don’t belong there. Oh crap-

“GERRIES, GERRIES IN THE WATER!” I spray the water with .30 lead. Not aiming. My shots are panicked, erratic; I need to be calm, controlled, actually aim. By now only a few others are pulling out their firearms. We were caught with our pants down around our ankles, members in our hands, how did we let this happen?

By now, Captain is bellowing over the gunfire. Somehow he is heard because people start rushing in to spray at the enemy. People are rushing off the bridge, poor chumps were stuck in the middle. No matter which way they go, they won’t have enough time. Their only hope was us. They drop their stuff and start peppering the already-seasoned water with their own .45 ammunition at 700 rounds a minute.

They are panicking, we need to save them. The Gerries are coming too fast. I can’t panic, people are depending on me.

One slips out of my field of vision, under the bridge. The realization hits everyone at once. Looking in their eyes. Even at this range, I can see the hope leave and the
simple realization settle in. Their eyes widen one last time as the explosion sets off. They’re falling now as the bridge collapses.

They just fall straight down, no fabulous explosion, just a loud pop and the entire section collapses. There’s close to no hope for them. The river is frigid and wide. The current is too swift that even if they were strong swimmers, they would still be swept downstream.

Everybody is scrambling to get lines now, trying to save the miraculous screw up, but in the end only four people are dragged out, three of them die soon afterwards from hypothermia. The fourth, he has to get a leg amputated and is sent home for good. I don’t know about what happened to him afterwards. Later, I hear later he took his own life, I can’t, no, don’t want to believe that he did.

“Zoltan,” Jack is walking towards me now. “Hey, we need you here, it’s part of war, people die, both our men and theirs. Man the hell up and finish the job.”

I storm away in sullen silence. There’s nothing I can say to that, I just need to be alone for now. I round the corner and Captain is standing there. We end up smashing into each other. Before I can get around him, he grabs me and shoves me into the side of the tank. “I know where you’re going! Don’t go down that road. If you do, I will personally chase you down, grab you, sock you a good one and carry you out, and then probably give you latrine duty. We lost people already today, I’m not losing another one. If you go off, then they were lost completely in vain. Finish the job and then go get drunk and cry at a bar. Until then, you’re focusing on the job. Our next mission is to take Menden. If you aren’t here, we could very well get blown up. I want to trust you, but you, aren’t giving me any reason to.”

This is the first time I’ve seen any emotion but anger out of Captain. It’s almost as if he cares. If this is affecting him like this, something is really wrong then.

For the rest of the war, it is my mantra, “Just focus on the job, I can cry about it later.” It helps me handle everything else that comes along. It keeps me sane when I see the slave-labor camps. It helps me in almost all the crises I’ve had since I got home.

It is that which I am passing on to you. Life will always beat the living crap out of you, but there will always still be something to do. You can’t let life stop you. You have to finish the job or else life has won. Crying now won’t help the situation any. There will always be time later to cry about your woes. Until then, just finish your job.
Homecoming
Aleyah Grimes
Whole structures and lush green scenery blurred by as the bus is sped along the street taking us home. It was so different there now, even though it had only been a year or two. The bus came to a stop at a red light and I got a chance to look at things without them flying past me. I saw the ice cream parlor I last took Julia to before I was shipped off to that hell-hole. That time seemed so long ago. So long ago.

“James,” exclaimed a grinning man. He grasped my shoulder with his free hand as he had a sling on his left arm.

“What ya want, Charlie?” I asked while still gazing out the window.

“We’re almost home. Home with good food. Home with friends. Home with family,” Charlie said excitedly.

“I know, big brother. I’m excited too,” I replied.

He looked at me then patted my shoulder, then walked back to his seat. Truth was, I was more nervous about going home than excited. I was nervous about Ma and Pa, and of course my girlfriend, Julia.

Finally arriving at the drop-off point, everyone grabbed their bags and looked for their family and friends who came to pick them up. Ma’s, Pa’s, wives, children, and friends all came to greet and bring us home. They were all happy and teary. No one was there to greet Charlie and me, to pick us up, or even to welcome us home. I said my farewells to those that made it back. I found Charlie, then we grabbed our bags and started walking. We had only each other. By now it was already midday on our way home. We made it to the driveway in a few hours. Hopefully we made it in time for dinner.

“We’re almost home,” yelled Charlie. He pointed towards a glimmer of light off in the distance. It was the front porch light. As I was looking at the light, I heard running. Charlie had rocketed off. After at least four hours of walking he suddenly got this energy out of nowhere.

“Wait up, Charlie!” I yelled after Charlie, as I begin running.

I caught up with Charlie by the time we got to the front door. Usually he was a lot faster when running, but the sling got in his way. The aroma from Ma’s mash, pot roast, and homemade biscuits filled the air outside the house with a nostalgic scent. I knocked on the door because Charlie seemed to have frozen in place and couldn’t bring himself to knock on the door.

“Who the heck would be out here at this time of night!?” yelled out an old cranky woman’s voice. The voice of my upbringing.

“Calm down Ma, I will go check,” replied another woman’s voice. Sounds of footsteps approached the door. It slowly opened behind the screen door, and the light from inside flooded outside.

Standing there with an apron tied around her slender waist, sleeves rolled up, and a face of an angel stood Vicky Lancer.

“Char...Charl...” Vicky said with tears in her eyes. She embraced him with such emotion. “Charlie, I didn’t know you were going to be home so soon! Charlie!” Charlie had teared up a bit and stroked her hair with his free hand while the other held her close.

Patting her shoulder as I walked by, I said, “It’s nice to see you too, Vicky.” As I walked inside the house the feeling of being home, to be truly home, was heartwarming. I did not expect to have missed this old, fading, historic house. The times I had missed because of the war was depressing.

The cries of a toddler from what sounded like the living room caught my attention. I dropped my bags and headed toward the source of the crying. There she
was, laying in a crib, crying. She was beautiful. I picked her up and rocked her in my arm; it was the first time I ever saw her. I had missed out so much of her life ‘cause of this war. I know Charlie had definitely missed a lot, because he missed her birth too. I could only imagine how he must have felt about it. She calmed down and fell back to sleep on my shoulder.


“I was fighting for you.” I replied. She rested her head on my back.

Vicky and Charlie walked into the living room. Charlie seemed to have stopped being teary, but his eyes were still a little red. He looked like he was gonna start crying again the moment he saw his daughter for the first time. I gently handed her over to him so I wouldn’t wake her up. She woke up and started to cry a bit, but Charlie calmed her down in same manner as me.

“There, there, Amanda. Daddy is home now,” Charlie said with tears rolling down his face and the biggest smile he ever had.

“Charlie! James!” yelled out two old voices. It was Ma and Pa. They came in from kitchen. Smiling as always, they embraced us one at a time. Carefully hugging Charlie as to not wake up Amanda again.

“She is so big, Vicky,” Charlie said while gently patting Amanda’s back. He had never looked this happy before. It was the first time Charlie had been able to see Amanda. Vicky was four months’ pregnant with Amanda when we left for the war. Julia grasped my hand. I held her hand in mine. I didn’t want to let her go.

“Her first word was ‘Daddy,’” said Vicky.

“Did you hear that, James!?!?” exclaimed Charlie. “I have missed so much, but no more. I will always be there for you, sweetheart.” He looked at his shoulder where Amanda was sleeping.

The war. It made Charlie miss important times with Vicky, and especially Amanda. He wasn’t there for her birth, her first word, or her first birthday. He missed so much of her life. Now that the war was over we could both focus on making up for lost times.

I turned to Julia and kiss her forehead. “Julia, I mi--” I tried to say before I got cut off by Ma.

“Come on now! My sons are home, and we have delicious food set up in the next room. Let’s go eat,” she said smiling.

I simply smiled and started for the dining room. We all sat down and waited for Charlie as he put Amanda back in the crib because he wanted to say grace. I held Julia’s hand with a tight grip. She looked over at me and smiled.

I leaned towards her and told her, “Julia, I have missed you, and that war made me miss out on many things. I love you. I’m going to make it up to you. I love you.”

She started tearing up and replied, “I love you, too.”
“Alan?” a voice in the distance called. “Alan where are you?” the voice grew louder.

I wanted to call back. “I’m here, I’m over here!” but no sound left my body.

I couldn’t move, I couldn’t speak. All I could do was lay there motionless and just wait. My mind couldn’t focus, and my sight was blurred. I felt as if I was dreaming, as if I were dead.

“I found him! He’s over here!” the voice yelled out.

My eyes began to close.

I could hear noises. There all around me, they consumed me. I was blind, all I could see was black. I couldn’t move my legs. As I begin to wake, I slowly opened my eyes. The air burned and my eyes watered. Blinding lights hung above me. A nurse stood at the end of my bed holding a clipboard. She scanned through the sheets attached, then realized I was staring at her.

“Oh good you’re awake. You had us worried,” she said.

“What happened?” I asked before she walked away.

“You were too close to a bomb when it was dropped, my dear. You’re lucky to be alive,” she said with a smile, then turned and walked away.

My entire body trembled, the pain was unbearable. It took every ounce of energy I had to try to stay awake, to try and focus on the situation. I had so many questions to ask. I needed to know if my friend Erik was alive. I could vaguely remember being with him before the bomb went off. Erik and I were war buddies. We never left each other’s side. If anything were to happen I knew he would have my back, just like I would have his. Being around Erik made me feel safe. Being alone in Infantry could be deadly. The job was hard and terrifying, having someone by my side had made it somewhat bearable. My hand was the only part of me I could move. I couldn’t move it much, but I figured if I could raise it up enough then I could get the nurse’s attention. My mind was not on my side. I lacked the strength to lift my hand, and the focus to be able to do so.

“Just do it!” I repeatedly told myself. Nothing was happening.

“DO IT!” I screamed inside my mind.

The struggle was too much for my body to handle, I passed out from the pain.

“Alan!” my father called.

“Go feed the chickens, will ya?”

“Okay, Dad!” I hollered back.

I was standing in the corner of my kitchen from my childhood home. That isn’t even the weirdest part. I was twenty-eight years old, currently staring at myself when I was ten. My whole family sat at the dinner table. My mom, dad, John and my five sisters all sat there laughing and carrying on like we always did.

“John, tell your momma what you saw today,” he said.

John had a devious look on his face. He shook his head and kept eating his dinner. They were having chicken and potatoes. Momma sure did make some good food. She did the best she could with what we had. Dad was injured during the war so we had to live off his twelve dollars a month pension. That wasn’t enough to spread out among ten people, but we made do. I guess I was dreaming this. I could still feel the pain in my body.

Just when John began to answer my father, my body was thrown into another scene. I stood in the back of a large crowd. I wasn’t quite sure where I was.

“Where are we?” I tried asking the woman beside me.

She didn’t hear me. I touched her shoulder but still no reaction. I was not visible in these dreams. I didn’t let that stop me from finding out where I was. I walked through the crowd trying to reach where everyone’s main focus was located. Tears filled the eyes of those who surrounded me. The closer I got to the front the more faces I began to recognize. Right when I thought there was no end to the crowd of people I broke through. There I stood in front of the deep-brown casket
where my father laid. His face drained of life. I dropped to my knees. Tears streamed down my face and a knot gathered in my throat. I looked up to see my close family standing close by. I walked over. Not a single tear was forming in my past self’s eyes.

“What is wrong with you?” I yelled at myself.

“I can’t do it,” he calmly said back.

“Just say a few words, dear. It would mean the world to me and your father if you spoke,” mother whispered to my past self.

“What do you mean, you can’t do it? That’s our father laying there.”

I realized he wasn’t responding to me but to our mother.

“I’m sorry, Mom, but I just can’t do it.”

And my young self dropped his head in shame.

This was the worst moment in my life. I disappointed my mom at my father’s funeral. I wanted nothing more but to be able to stand up and speak about my father. As I sat there I couldn’t think of a single thing to say. I loved my father, but the fact was I never truly thought he loved me. Our relationship was always on the edge. I never thought he was proud of me, and I never thought I could live up to his expectations. If I could go back I would stand up in front of that crowd and speak.

A month after my father passed I found a letter in his desk addressed to me. It read:

_Dear Son,

Your mother has been on my case to write to you since the day you told us you were leaving. You know how I am about writing letters, just a bunch of nonsense that can wait till you get home. I’ll keep it short. I’m proud of you, son. I know I may not show it, but that is a part of the McAndrew blood. Us men don’t show emotion. My father never babied me, so I never babied you. I have been tough on you for so many years because I love you. I knew how much potential you had and I wanted to make sure you reached it. Take care of yourself out there, son.

~Dad_

I was angry my father never sent me that letter. It would have changed so much to know how he felt. When I showed Momma the letter she cried for days. Tears began to fall from my face again. It felt as if I was living his death all over again.

“I have to get out of here,” I screamed. Running away isn’t going to get me out of this scene. I sat there on the ground in front of my mom and gathered all my strength to try and focus on waking up. This dream was too much for me to handle.

“Focus, Alan, focus!” I yelled.

Finally I could slowly feel my body fading.

I could feel the lights beam down on me. It was an uncomfortable feeling, and I wasn’t quite sure how anyone could fall asleep feeling like a bug under a microscope. The pain was still there but not as bad as before. I slowly opened my eyes, and there she was. My nurse was once again standing at the end of my bed, this time she was staring at me.

“Good morning,” she said.

Her beauty was breathtaking, and her smile numbed my pain. I don’t know why I didn’t notice before. I guess the pain was really the only thing I could focus on. This time I was able to stay awake.

“Where is Erik, Erik Reynolds?” I choked out.

“Look to your left,” she said then turned and walked away.

I gently turned my head to the left. My neck was sore, but it probably was the only part of me that wasn’t in throbbing pain other than my hands. Being thrown around fifty feet can really mess someone up. As I looked to my left I saw him. Erik was lying in the bed right beside me. He looked tore up too, but he looked a hell of a lot better than I probably did. He turned and looked at me with smirk.

“I told you I would always be by your side, man,” he started laughing, but then it turned into a deep cough.

He grabbed his ribs, and his expression dropped from the pain.

“We are going to be all right man,” I explained.

“We are going to be all right,” he repeated.
Pacific Battle
Michaela Williams
Tommy’s eyes heavily stared at the top of the bunk. His nostrils filled with the thick aroma of fish guts and man, well, boy-man ... none of the guys in the bunker were over the age of twenty. He should be sleeping, the sun would rise soon, and the calmness of his bunk would shatter when the endless day of a navy soldier began. He tried again to close his eyes and let the rocking of the ship take him to a deep, dark sleep.

When he let his eyes close, the images of home played in his mind like a projector aimed at the inside of his eyelids. He did not want to admit he missed his silly little town. After all, he wanted to leave, get away, and make something of himself. Sometimes, though, he would indulge himself in a small memory. Just a quick glimpse of his town, school, and on only special occasions his high school sweetheart. He paused took a deep, stale breath and let his thoughts take him down the street. Past the corner five ‘n’ dime, Tommy could almost smell the morning dew on the freshly cut grass. He gave a mischievous smile to himself as he stepped off the sidewalk and onto the churchyard’s lawn. He went to bow his head and stir up the coots when “Whack!”

“Hey, Tommy Gun, get the hell up. Not like you to sleep in.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Tommy gave a smile to his bunk-mate and best friend Redd. Rubbing the new bump on his head, he threw his legs out of the side of the bunk to put on his pants.

“Dreaming about that dame of yours again? Give it up, Tommy, we all know she’s not real.”

“No, what’s not real, Redd is all the gas that comes out of you at night. I don’t know what’s worse, you or a pile of manure.” Redd was a keen, funny guy, and he had the ability to make even the most horrifying situations seem comical. No one really could tell what Redd was thinking, not until he let it out. Tommy had the feeling with all the swearing and jok-
“...forty-eight-hundred hours, men. Get in, get out, do as much as you can.” The officer then gestured to the tiny boats.

“Ed was telling me the Japs have been putting up one hell of a fight,” Redd said, nudging Tommy in the side. Tommy didn’t respond to Redd but instead kept looking at the island. “Tommy Gun? Thomas!”

“What? Oh, yeah, the Japs, they were supposed to get their tails kicked, right?”

“Wake the hell up, man. What is with you today?”

“Sorry, Redd, I’m just not in it today.” “Well, get in it.” Redd smacked Tommy in the back and gestured to the island. “From the look of this fight, it ain’t going to stop any time soon.” Redd and Tommy, along with twenty-five other men, loaded onto the small boats ready to take them to shore. As they neared the beaches, colors and sounds exploded into the air. Tommy couldn’t help but think it sounded almost like a fourth of July celebration at the county fair. The battle cries he heard he knew were nowhere near sounds of joy that came from a fireworks display.

As the wind and saltwater tore away at his face, Tommy kept imagining how the battle would look all lit up with fireworks. What could be more awesome than blowing up a Japanese plane with the good ol’ red, white, and blue colors in the sky? The boat rocked to its side, and Tommy stumbled to catch his feet and looked up to see they were already unloading the boats. He grabbed hold of his medical bag and slung it back over his shoulders. Then Tommy exhaled. He knew what he was about to see, but that didn’t make seeing it any easier.

When he made it to the shore Tommy had a moment to catch his breath and look around. He wished he didn’t even open his eyes. The beach was littered with only the semblance of men. He looked down and saw two eyes staring at him from what looked like a head half-blown up from a bomb and half-eaten by wildlife. Tommy closed his eyes and tried to shut it out, but it was already imprinted into his brain like carvings etched in stone. Never look at the faces, Tommy reminded himself.

“Hey! Tommy!” Redd was on the other side of the beach leading into the jungle. He was holding onto a soldier’s arm as he popped it back into place. “Tommy get over here, there’s a couple more who need help!” Tommy dashed to Redd’s side and knelt in the hot sand.

“There,” Redd pointed. “Over there, think he’s got a cracked rib.”

Tommy looked over and saw a young marine propped up against a palm tree, holding his stomach as if his guts were about to fall out all over his lap. Tommy ran over to the palm tree.

“What’s wrong with you?” he asked. The boy looked up, terrified, but not in his face only his eyes. Tommy knew the look all too well; it meant something was wrong. “What’s your name?” Tommy yelled to the boy.

“James.” Tommy could barely hear him over the sound of the bombs exploding in the background.

“Okay, James, unbutton your uniform so I can take a look at those ribs.” James painfully unbuttoned the rest of his tattered uniform. Tommy went to his medical bag to grab bandages, the only thing they really had to help the marines. He watched the boy out of the corner of his eye. He saw the bruises across his chest. He did not just break a rib, he broke his whole damn rib cage. Tommy guiltily couldn’t help but think how lucky he was to have joined the navy instead of the marines. Tommy put his hand on the boy’s back for a better grip to wrap him. The boy flinched at the pain but made no sound. He couldn’t be any older then Tommy.

Tommy remembered the day his friend, Samuel, convinced him not to join the marines. Tommy had just finished swimming a couple of laps at the YMCA pool and was about to hit the showers when his buddy Samuel stopped him.

“ Heard you been thinking about the
marines,” Samuel smirked. He knew that was all Tommy had been talking about since the war started. “Yeah, what about it, Sam?”

“Don’t.” Samuel stared at him. “The marines is a bloodbath. If you’re serious about enlisting then go somewhere else. Hey, you’re a volunteer medic for the firestation, right?”

“Yeah, Station 12.”

“Then join the navy as a corpsmen and try to come back alive.”

Tommy remembered thinking Sam must have thought he was chicken. Tommy took his advice anyway and signed up for the navy two weeks later as a corpsman.

“LOOK OUT!” Tommy felt a large force pull him to the ground. A huge “bang” went off, leaving his ears ringing. Tommy raised his head out of the dirt to see the palm tree had fallen over and crushed the boy beneath it. Tommy picked himself up and looked to see Redd next to him with a giant cut up his arm. Tommy help Redd to his feet. Tommy looked down at the boy’s pale white skin striped with blue bruises and scarlet blood flowing across his broken-ribbed chest. There, he thought, is your fourth of July. There is your red, white, and blue.

Redd was back by the soldier whose wounds he was dressing earlier.

“It’s no use fixing him up here, Redd. There will be more bombs.” Tommy ran over and picked up the soldier from under his healthy shoulder.

“Let’s go.”

Tommy looked up at the sky. Bombs crossed the sun like shooting stars on a black night. The sun was completely overhead now, but on the Pacific it always seemed high in the sky. Tommy paused to wipe blood off his chin and sweat from his eyes.

“And the day is only just beginning.”
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