

Cardinal Snow
By Hunter Winn

“Wake up, Jergan, son. Breakfast is ready.” A soft voice guided me out of bed; the warm smell of scrambled eggs opened my eyes.

“Oh, Mom, I can make my own breakfast. You should be resting.”

She put the plate of eggs down. “Well, I just thought you should have something to eat. You barely pick up breakfast before you go to work. I just don’t want you to get hungry.”

“Alright, Mom. Just, promise me you’ll go to bed when I leave, ok?”

She looked at me and held out her hand. “Ok, let’s shake on it.”

I rolled my eyes and shook on it. She left me in the room to gaze outside the window, and low and behold, it was snowing. The Decembers reminded me of joy, a realization that no matter what, happiness can be found.

I gathered my belongings and got dressed for work; the winter’s call for heavy jackets and boots. While it may still seem cold on the outside, the gear made it a sweat box. I tromped down the splintered stairs and Mom was waiting for me.

“It really took you that long?” she snickered.

I sarcastically replied, “Yes, it did.”

She hugged me and let me through the door. “Ok, please be safe Jergan, you can never tell what will happen out there. Promise me that. And here’s a little for Stephan.”

She handed me two rolls of bread wrapped in a red cloth.

I looked at her and hugged her for comfort. “I’ll be safe.”

“You better get some rest, we shook on it.” My mother smiled and walked back inside to escape the snow, as I trudged off into it.

Stefan waved me to the wall, then soon joined me there.

“You think Berlin will ever take it down?”

“Shush, we don’t talk about that.”

Stefan glared back at me, and I looked at the sky to avoid awkwardness. The snow started falling harder, turning our hats into snowballs.

“Oh, I almost forgot, my mom gave me rolls for me this morning, care to have some?”

“We’re going to catch pneumonia if we stay out here much longer. I’m going to head inside and switch with Volkov,” he muttered, shivering, and walked into the burdensome snow. I felt bad for Stefan, he wasn’t used to the snow here, so it bugged him a lot.

I hugged my rifle for warmth, my hat was about to freeze to my scalp. The cold air stung my face over and over until my lips turned purple.

I could hear footsteps coming clear as day. The black shadow faded out of the misty snow.

“Hey.... I didn’t expect a little man to help me protect these walls.” Compared to me, Volkov looked like a Kodiak bear. He spoke in a deep voice, deeper than Stefan’s and mine at

least. I shrugged off his comment and looked down at the snow. Stephan and I have been friends since high school- if anyone should have been out there with me, it should have been him.

“Ehh, it's okay little man, I know you can pull the trigger as well as me.” He patted me on the back, almost knocking me to the ground. Volkov rolled his eyes and began to whistle.

My patience was waning. I wanted to head to the guard station to warm up and get a reprieve from these blizzard conditions. Volkov continued to whistle and hum to pass the time.

“I'm going to walk towards the building, maybe have Stefan come out to replace me for a bit.” Volkov barely glanced at me as I said this.

I almost touched the door handle to the building, then I heard a yell. A yell so piercing it could cut through titanium.

I quickly pulled the gun off my back and turned around. The wind started blowing in my direction. I desperately tried to keep my eyes open; I needed to see what was going on. I had one hand shielding my eyes and another on the grip of my gun. It was a white sand storm, shutters opening and closing with the whispering air, telling secrets to whoever would listen.

I saw Volkov on the ground, his blue jacket frosted. He laid there, arm stiff in the air, his gun rested in the blinding snow. I saw the man next to him. Breathing hard, trying to catch his breath. Cardinal drops of blood were dripping down to the man's chest. He had to be trying to get across. I knew this moment had to come, I wasn't prepared for it. The hair on my neck was standing up. I wanted to go home, to sit in my room and look at the snow through the window, the waft of cookies, and the open smell of flickering blaze.

My whole life I was taught to never hurt another. Thoughts of my father, and my lonely mother overcame me. These thoughts controlled me, choosing my actions. Volkov's life was in my hands, and I couldn't watch him die.

My hands and fingers twitched as I raised my gun. Volkov turned his head towards me, “Shoot him! C'mon, shoot him!”

The man tried to run, limping with every step in the snow. I squeezed the trigger. For just a second, the snow stopped falling. The man dropped; the snow wasn't snow anymore, but a deep red instead. I released my gun to the ground and fell, as if my bones gave in right there. The cold air brushed my hair and face, and wisped onward. The flakes were trickling down, like white diamonds from the sky. Soon my ears, nose, and eyes became numb. The muffled sound of feet stomping against the snow got closer and closer. A blurry vision of Stephan grabbed me by the legs and tried to drag me to the building. He laid me on my side.

“Oh hell, wake up, Little Man, you need to wake up!”