

Chapter 6

Life here is not easy.

The calendar marked August 16, 1936. A day prior, Emma received the best news of her life so far. The moment for which she had been imagining since her early life was now becoming reality, like coming directly out of her imagination. All the waking up early, jogging, exercises, working hard, keeping her dream a secret, had not gone at least in vain.

The enlistment letter sent by her school has been approved by the Iowa State Military Training Centre, which was a big moment of happiness for Emma.

In the sweet morning of August 16th, Emma rose from bed, like how a small seedling comes out of the ground, getting ready to face the world. Her eyes all glittering, a small but visible smile on her face, became her default expression that day. Her eyebrows raised, like a child receiving their favorite toy. She was all set, finally going to live her dream. She had taken off to go to the recruit program. If selected, she could start the actual training after her finals are over.

“Look at my daughter, or should I say, future Private Emma Philes? Who will climb the ranks!” Mr Philes exclaimed. “You don’t need to just ‘say’, father. The girl standing in front of you WILL become a noble officer!” Emma said, while pushing her short hair behind with her hand, a gesture of confidence and pride.

Mr Philes let out a pleasing laugh. That’s more like it! You are behaving just like me when I went into the army!”

“Oh come now, you two, you know you can't be late! It’s already 7 am!” Mrs. Philes said from behind. Her eyes were on her daughter, a face that couldn’t stop smiling. She patted Emma, like a comforting support from behind, which would stay with her all the time.

“Come on! Let’s not be late! Or else the instructor will make you run the whole town!”

They both went to their car, *Trump*, a Ford Model A, had been with Emma for a long time.

It was among those objects Emma had, which, although not alive, were a part of Emma’s family. It was a black car, a simple black Ford Model A.

They both sat inside Trump and got ready. Mr. Philes, to see a military academy again, and for Emma, to see it for the first time. Mr Philes started the engine.

“Emma! Wait!” a voice was heard, like a person wanting to meet his loved one for the last time.

Emma turned around, saw here and there to locate the source of the sound. Then, far away on the road, she spotted 2 figures running towards her. She focused on seeing who it was, her eyes narrowing in the bright sunshine. As the 2 figures came closer, their faces were clear. They were Emma's classmates.

One was Ryan, Emma's ex-crush, who had always been kind towards Emma and always cheered her up, even sometimes overdosing. He was like a small brother to Emma, though they were of the same age. The other was Rockis, just a year older than Emma, but he has a deep understanding of emotions and how to respond to situational stimuli. He always guided Emma and saved her many times from getting into trouble. She was like a small sister for Rockis, who has dreams but lacks guidance in some fields, but his big brother is there to help here.

They came running down till they reached Emma.

Ryan, bending down and placing his hands on his thighs, as a result of the long run to Emma. Rockis was all gentleman type, no short of breath, no sweat, just a disciplined and well-dressed boy standing.

Good morning, Mr Philes. Good morning, Emma" Rockis said with a sweet and confident voice.

"HUFF, HUFF. Good..morn-ing, Mr Philes." Ryan greeted, while catching his breath.

"Ha-ha. Take it easy, boys." Mr Philes said the Ryan and Rockis.

"Why are you two here? You said you have a presentation today!" Emma asked, with concern about their upcoming speech and demonstration in front of the Principal today.

"Well, we were just here to see you! Didn't you expect that?" Ryan exclaimed with joy. His eyes had such happiness like he had won a Nobel prize.

"But, your presentation..." Emma replied.

"You see, Emma, we will get many presentations, but seeing our friend going to achieve her dream, hits different, and is a one-time opportunity!" Rockis explained to Emma, still calm, answering like giving out presentations is his day-to-day work.

"At least let me get to the training centre!" Emma laughed.

"Oh yeah! You must be late!" Ryan realized.

"So, should we go now?" Mr Philes asked Emma, placing his arm on her head.

"You tell me, should I go?" Emma asked Ryan and Rockis, with a grin on her face, like they would not affect them.

"You haven't ever listened to us, even during tests, have you?" Rockis replied.

"That's my friends!"

Trump had now started, its round legs now fully ready to take Emma to her destination.

It started moving and was already on the road.

"Don't strain your leg there like you always do!" Ryan shouted from a distance.

Emma waved back in reply.

After a quick 30-minute drive, on the outskirts of Iowa, stood a big facility.

"IOWA MILITARY RECRUITMENT CENTRE" was written widely on the board outside the main facility. The premise was surrounded by tall trees and bushes. One could witness a towering watch tower from a distance. The covering on top of the tower was green, the walls were sandy in colour, like a 1930s military centre.

There were many people near the entrance gate to fill out the necessary details. The recruits were mostly males, around the same age as Emma, with the same goal in mind as Emma's. But Emma sensed a problem. Wherever her eyes went, only big, muscular boys with serious faces filled the place. She didn't notice a single girl out there. Although she made a habit of and was pretty comfortable with boys at school, the situation here was different.

"What happened, dear? Are you good?" Mr Philes questioned, seeing that the face was Emma's. Eyebrows curled upwards, eyes expressed like she had sensed something bad, and she was rubbing her hands nervously.

"Oh, nothing Father!" Emma replied, with a sudden smile overwriting the words of tension and nervousness on her face with one of happiness and excitement.

As they were talking, a man came up to them. "Excuse me, sir." The man said, standing behind them, making not a single sound of steps on his coming up.

Mr Philes turned around quickly, not sensing a person behind him.

The man appeared to be tall, wearing a round hat, a black, formal suit, with a white shirt and black tie. The clothes had no irregularities or stains on them; the shirt was pure white and clean, so much so that it looked like pure white painted cloth. The black part of the clothes was the same, well-ironed, with a red flower in the pocket of the coat, peeping out like it is seeking help. The man also wore white gloves and a mask, which covered the part of his chin to the nose. The pair of black and white, and the quality of the clothes, the ironing, the placement of the tie and suit, made the man look like a realistic mannequin.

The thing that made the man different from normal was that his head was tilted a little downwards. The brim of his hat was trying to cover his eyes, and a faint yellow glow in his eyes.

Emma, seeing the man, felt like she had seen him before, but couldn't remember when.

Mr Philes instantly caught these details. The man looked very fishy, but still he remained calm.

"Yes?" Mr Philes replied to the stranger.

"Is that girl.... Your daughter?" The stranger asked, with a low, smooth voice, enough to send shivers down anyone's spine in an instant. The consistency, even in the inconsistent words, was just otherworldly.

"Yes, is there any problem?" Mr Philes, calmly but cautiously replied.

"Is she.... here to join the army?" the man slowly asked, as if he was going to kill a person after he had listened to his words.

"Yes" Mr Philes replied confidently, like standing strong against a storm.

"I see." The man goes away, entering the centre through a small gate in the corner.

Other people were listening too. When they heard that a girl was deciding to go into the army, whispers began to be heard.

"A girl, here? Seriously?" "I think she had lost the way to the nurses' training institute."

"Ha-ha-ha, is she mad?" "Army is of men and boys, who allowed a girl to even enter here?"

Such type of comments filled the air, even if they were just whispers among people.

Emma, hearing this, clenched her fist, her eyebrows now bending downwards; she tilted her head down, gritting her teeth, as if almost ready to enter a fight.

"Next!" the recruiter shouted in the ongoing situation. Although it was normal there, the way he shouted felt like he was telling the people to go home or come here.

Emma slowly walked towards her; the taunts and laughs of people around her irritated her. They tried to discourage her, not accepting that a girl can match a boy in any sense. They expected the recruiter to just reject Emma on the spot, with the same thought.

Emma gave the confirmation application to the recruiter, who was a bulky person, with large muscles, big fingers, and an angry face, with a green hat on his head, looking like it was stopping the "anger steam" coming out from his head.

The recruiter read the application, and without even looking in the register of entry, he stamped the application with the approval stamp.

"Get in fast." He ordered Emma.

The people around, along with Emma, were shocked. He didn't even look at his register, containing the names and faces of people to give entry, and let a common girl enter, as if he knew she would be coming. Emma went inside, still confused about the incident.

But the sound of the whistle buried her confusion.

In front of Emma were massive military instructors, recruits running around the ground, some doing push-ups, some climbing ropes, some jumping over obstacles, and well, some getting absolutely scolded by the drill instructors.

As she was just seeing all this, a boy came from behind and pushed her, without even noticing, or as it seemed. Emma was enraged, but didn't say anything.

"All right! All the recruits who have just come make a line here! Girls over here and boys there!"

The recruits, including Emma, took their respective positions.

But the difference in the ratio of female recruits to male recruits was MASSIVE.

There were about 30 people in total in that batch. Boys were 26 and girls were just 4, including Emma.

Still, the instructor seemed like he didn't care.

"Listen up, you good-for-nothings! I am your drill instructor, Sergeant Morrin Stemat, and I will make this place hell for you all. YOU GOT THAT!?"

"Yes, sir" the recruit replied.

"CAN'T HEAR!" Sergeant shouted.

"YES SIR!" the recruit shouted with all of the air in their lungs, some already out of air.

"Take this training uniform with you and change in....(he looks at his watch) 1 and a half minutes!" the sergeant ordered.

The recruits started running towards the changing room. But the boys were very bad. They started intentionally pushing the girls during the run, making it look unintentional.

"IF YOU CAN'T STAND UP STRAIGHT, GO TO THE NURSING INSTITUTE!" The sergeant shouted at the girls. They stabilized themselves and went to the changing room.

After exactly 1 minute and 30 seconds, the time limit set by the Sergeant, only Emma was the one who came to her position. All other recruits came 3 to 10 seconds late, with messy uniforms.

But Emma had worn her uniform very well.

After everyone had assembled, the Sergeant guided them towards the training ground.

"On your first day, the first thing you all will learn is commands. All the physical training is useless if you don't follow the orders of your seniors. DO YOU GET IT?" The sergeant shouted.

"YES SIR!" the recruits too.

The training followed was basic command and discipline training. The sergeant explained commands like "Attention" "At ease" "Fall in" and other commands. The recruits had to hear and act accordingly in an instant and in coordination; even a second delay is caught by Morris, who was experienced.

The recruits were horrible at doing that. Some forgot the commands while others lost focus. All those who made mistakes were scolded by the sergeant, horribly. Except for Emma and another recruit, who were performing way better than the others.

"Stop! Look at the mess you just created in front of me! I AM WASTING MY TIME ON RECRUITS LIKE YOU!" The sergeant shouted.

He pointed towards Emma and Jonas Winkley, the other recruit.

"You two do better! Better not waste my time along with this bunch of idiots!" he shouted, with an angry voice, similar to that of a demon.

"YES SIR!" they both replied, confused as they thought they had done better.

"Oh boy, this is going to be way harder than I imagined. Life here is not easy, I've sensed that much." Emma thought, after hearing the sergeant tear her eardrums with his voice, along with others.

Lies ahead the real world, real problems, and challenges for Emma Philes