

James flinched as the gunshot filled the air cautiously he checked his watch, it sat in his palm choking in water, the cogs clogged with filth and ash; the glass face cracked and smashed. He carefully brushed away these sharp edges and lovingly ran his fingers over the back where the raised lettering of 'Katherine' remained him of a time before war. It made him weep, but he was a soldier now and emotions had no place in his heart. Jason coughed; It was harrowing sound, shallow and filled with flem as he turned to face Jason he saw a dribble of red on the back of his hand he pointed to it with a shivering finger.

"C-cut m-m-myself" Jason chattered through blue lips. Both of them knew that staying here would not do and so they clambered onto the struts of the field bridge, letting the cold metal slicked with rain and dew wet their hands. James felt exhausted as he climbed, every pull of his muscles felt like he would rip his arm from its socket. Until, at last they climbed over to the solid metal bridge, its cold surface slick with mud, oil and blood. James forced himself up, leaning back down with an open hand which Jason took, it took a lot for James to pull him up, but they had made the first part of their journey, James looked back at the ruined city that he and many others had called home. He sighed the cold water dripping off his limbs with every movement.

"lets go" he said through numb lips, and began to walk down the dirt path, all the while feeling hate and anger bore into his skull from Jason, but he chose to ignore the challenge as it would harm them both.

Jason hated James for all he had done, how had he let two of his squad fall to the enemy?

Yes, he had objected to taking Frank with them, but he would have slowed them down, not for the fact that he didn't give a flying fart for Frank, he was young and naïve and had taken his place as the turret gunner, relegating him as the mortar operator, where Frank should have started his training. He pushed himself above the weariness that weighed his limbs down and continued to walk along the foggy road, James ahead of him stumbled, it was unlike him, as Jason closed the distance, he saw James looked pale and starved.

"Sir?" He said, worry crossing his voice, making James turn.

"Should we rest?" he said making James blink in surprise. "Are you tired?" James said

"I'm slightly hungry" Jason said, cracking a slight smile to not seem weak in the eyes of Jason, he saw the hard eyes of a veteran that had fought in the last war let a tiny amount of compassion of the man who had once been James Ropper showed before steely resolve clouded his vision, "we travel until the next village, there we eat"

“We will catch pneumonia before that” Jason said, aware of the cold clothes that stuck closely to his skin, making his skin itch and crawl.

“We are from the north, nothing we can’t handle” James said his hands unconsciously clenched into his armpits, the knuckles white as cold water was squeezed from his shirt, making him shiver.

“What else can we do?” James said, “there are no places to rest”

Jason nodded towards a set of walls that had been constructed in a square the tip of a tall tower barely visible, on either side was hard concrete bunkers, anti-tank weaponry bristled alongside machine-gun bunkers and behind all this was the recognisable shape of a row of thunder cannons, their barrels soared into the sky, the rims still smoking from the bombardment, James quickly ran his eyes over the base, seeing that it straddled the road. With a set of high iron gates at its entrance. “We need to move around this place” James said, his eyes scanning a set of murky shapes in the distance, the rumbling of an engine could be heard. “trucks” He said through chattering teeth, and began to walk over the marshy grounds towards the boxy shapes, Jason followed resigned to his orders as his brain was numb, he was walking with tired limbs and yet he would not fall over, They started like deer as they heard a rumble of an engine, but in the darkness they saw no light. Desperately they through themselves down in the sucking mud. The engine became louder and louder.

Jason heard James mutter a prayer, something he hadn’t done in years, it sounded sad and lonely so he joined in.