

Years 7 & 8

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We All Deserve Peace

Dmitri Ivan stared down at the Ukrainian province of Luhansk Oblast. Building lights glimmered before his eyes, reflecting the early dawn sky that still gleamed with constellations. His breath came out in wisps of fog as the cold licked up his arms – chilling him to the bone. Rubbing his hands together, he turned away from the mesmerizing lights to face the array of tanks that were organised behind him.

Russian soldiers sped along as their military commander barked orders here and there. Some carried boxes of ammunition, others carried guns and grenades but overall they carried the weight of their nation on their shoulders.

Dmitri turned away from the preparations to look back at Luhansk Oblast. Now that he thought about it – Luhansk was probably the heart of many of its people – where they made memories, had fun and loved one another – where they called home. Yet as he heard the shouts of preparation from behind him, he doubted that it would be that case after the Russians were done with it.

“Get in your positions! Infiltration will start in 30 minutes.”

A bellowing voice called out in the midst of the chaos. Letting out a soft sigh, Dmitri turned back and went into position. Clamping down his helmet, he hoped – no he prayed – that he wouldn’t have to get any blood on his hands today.

Down in Luhansk Oblast, Artem Bohanden patrolled the sleeping streets. As a Ukrainian soldier, he and his fellow troops were deployed to patrol the small province of Luhansk as tensions skyrocketed between Ukraine and Russia. Yet as he stared down the empty streets illuminated by a lamp post here and there, Artem realised that the only thing he’d have to be worried about was catching a cold in this chilling weather.

Chuckling to himself, he slowed down his march and lifted a cigarette to his mouth, cupping his hands in front of the lighter, he lit the stick and inhaled a long drag of the cig. As the smoke warmed his lungs, he thought about his family back in Kyiv. “My daughter would probably be asleep by now,” he muttered, looking up at the glistening night sky. Shaking his head, he dropped the cigarette to the ground and tread on it before walking away to continue patrol, hoping that the night would continue to be as silent as it was now.

A couple of streets from Artem, a six-year-old was getting tucked back into bed by her parents.

“Mum, can you read me one more story,” Nina pleaded as her parents wearily tucked her into bed.

“Sweetie, you woke us up at 1 am to read you a story,” her Mother whispered softly. “We only did so because you said you had a nightmare.” Her Dad nodded as he caressed her head and pushed back a strand of her hair. “She’s right sweetheart, Dad and Mum need their sleep too.” Nina whined but didn’t say a word as she watched them walk out of the room. Turning to her side, the six-year-old buried herself deeper into the blankets of her pink princess themed bed. Letting her thoughts render her to sleep.

Artem flinched as a loud bang echoed through the streets of Luhansk. Falling to his knees, he covered his head waiting for the ringing in his ears to stop. All around him lights of houses and buildings flickered on as the ground shook beneath his feet. Stumbling to a stand, he grabbed his gun firmly in one hand before grabbing his walkie-talkie with the other.

“Soldier 134 report, we are under attack!” Artem yelled into the device, yet all he received was the shrill sound of static. He felt his heart drop as in the distance, he saw multiple figures making their way towards him and the tiny province and he had a sinking feeling that they weren’t popping in to say hello.

Nina awoke to the bang of her door flying open. Rubbing at her eyes, she made out the silhouettes of her mother and father and it was at that moment, when she saw the horror in their faces, that Nina knew that something was terribly wrong. Her parents rushed towards her, Nina was lifted out her bed and into the embrace of her father’s arms who carried her out of the room. “Where are we going?” she muttered, her parents rushing around the house, stuffing anything they could find into a single backpack. The dreariness from her sleep made her forget to panic as well.

“Don’t worry about that honey,” her Mother said, her face adorned with a small smile that Nina immediately felt comfort in but as she watched her mother wipe the palm of her hand across her cheek, Nina wondered if they were ever going to come back home again. Her Father carried her and guided her Mother outside, the cold bit through her pyjamas causing Nina to shiver and bury her face further into her father’s neck seeking the comfort of his warmth. It wasn’t until her Father stopped that Nina peeked up from her Father’s neck.

Dmitri’s breaths came out in sharp bursts as he and the armed forces with him drew closer and closer towards Luhansk. Adrenaline pumped through his blood as his vision suddenly became more focused and concentrated. *For my country*, he chanted in his mind, over and over, trying to clear all the doubts that plagued his thoughts. And when the first few buildings came in sight, he split up with a couple of his fellow troops and separated. Wandering through the streets of Luhansk, Dmitri only paused once, and that was when the first bomb had gone off – signalling that the war had officially begun.

Gritting his teeth, he turned to see his other comrades pull out grenades and throw them into the open windows of homes and buildings. Screams and bangs filled the once tranquil silence while Dmitri watched in horror as his fellow soldiers started to shoot at the sudden influx of people who had left their homes in a panic-stricken daze. A man, woman, and a child came hurrying out of one of the building in front of him. He went to grab his gun and held it, but his shaky hands wouldn't allow him to have a proper grip.

The family in question paused when they saw him raise his gun towards them, from the Dad's arms he saw the child peek up and over at him. He couldn't do it. He wouldn't do it. Dmitri felt his head pound, it was stupid. Why was he fighting this war in the first place? Why did he have to hurt these innocent people? What did they do so wrong?

For my country, he thought.

The gun trembled under his hold as he raised it again, aiming it at the little girl's head.

Nina's eyes widened as she saw the military-clad man aim his gun towards them. She felt the grip of her Father tighten around her as her Mother grasped onto her arm. The three of them frozen in fear. Though Nina was a young child filled with fantasies and imaginations, she wasn't stupid. She knew what was about to happen and she really wished she didn't. Nina turned to look at her Mother and Father's face one last time.

"Does it hurt to die?" she asked her parents as silent tears roll down her cheeks. Her Mother leaned towards her and kissed her head.

"I don't know sweetie . . . I don't know."

"Does it hurt to die?" Dmitri heard from the little girl in her parents arms. Dmitri sucked in a sharp breath, he couldn't do it anymore, not for his country because he would've rather gone to the deepest pits of hell than hurt a single soul.

Bang!

Dmitri felt the pressure in his abdomen, a heat-soared through his stomach as he looked down to see the front of his clothes covered in scarlet.

It doesn't hurt to die as much as it would hurt to kill, Dmitri thought before he felt himself slipping away.

Artem aimed the gun at the enemy soldier's back and shot.

"GO!" he yelled at the family, looking away from the body on the floor in front of him. Watching as they disappeared into the darkness, Artem kneeled down towards the soldier on the floor and closed his eyes. Before standing up to fight once again, *We all deserve peace even in the hells of war*, he thought.