

## Angel of the White Snow:

I wake up. Snowflakes are falling like the feathers of a bird. My head is pounding. Shriill screams, sobs, and the sound of cannons replay in my head. Sunlight and black ash stream in through the window like puffs of coal. I fiercely blink my eyes; it seems as if I'm in one very long and agonizing nightmare. I roll off the bed in my abandoned house, stand up, and grimace in pain as I step on shards of debris. I almost look around to call out to Father to help care for me. But, remember, he's gone. "Stay sharp, buddy," he says. Striding off into the distance, he soon stops, turns around, and mouths the words 'I love you.' Then he shouts "I'll be back soon." It was like a scene from a movie.

But those words were a white lie, just like the freshly fallen snow.

But Father was sincere. Not prepared for the sad, inevitable truth. And neither was I. Until now.

'I miss him...'

Worn leather boots crunching the firm ice on the ground. Walking to school. Small community. A gang of boys my age pop out of an alleyway out of nowhere, suddenly surrounding me. They are clearly skipping school, as if they have no other care in the world than to make my existence miserable. They say, "Mute-boy! Why don't you talk to anybody?" They snicker as they remind me of my cruel reality. "Nothing, huh? No wonder no one in class likes you. And at that, NOBODY even wants a worthless CIRCUS MONSTER like yourself!" I wish I could yell, shut up, leave me be, but there's no use. I'm frightened. I pity them. Myself. They

feed off of my pain like crazed scavengers. 'They've nothing else better to do,' I think. But it still hurts.

Just like the gunshots that had so brutally killed my father.

And then a punch, slamming into my face. Fall to the ground. Kick, kick; I feel their boots crashing into the sides of my ribs. Tears stream down my cheeks. I try to raise my hands; 'Please stop!' I beg. But they are deaf. They can't hear my voice. No one can. No use in calling for help. So I curl up and take the blows, one after the other in the cold. The boys have only the remains of what used to be prey. A broken and vulnerable animal that lies helplessly on the ground, all torn up and bleeding, pleading for its life. They spit on me, do all they can to make themselves seem superior. But in the end, they're all enduring some of my suffering. Fathers dead, mothers fighting for survival. No income or food for the night. Deaths and injuries to loved ones.

All because of this war.

One takes out a serrated knife and smiles an eerie grin. He then slashes my leg, blood dripping down. I wince and shed more tears, but I remain silent for fear of something worse happening. But then I wonder, 'Is this not always the case? Will those who are seen as lesser human beings always remain silent?' They pay no heed to my suffering, and all those cruel boys say are "He still doesn't make any noise!" They continue mocking me, and the pain I feel both emotionally and physically was so intense that I was on the verge of passing out. Why can't they see me? Why can't they hear me? Eyelids half closed, I see a shadowy figure threaten the boys with a large object. They run away, cowering because they've been thrown off their high horse. I feel as if I was lifted up and carried away, but before I see anything else, I black out.

Regaining consciousness, I realize I'm laying down. I raise my head from the cold concrete floor. I try to stand up, but then I remember that my leg has a deep gash. I manage to prop myself up against the firm wall. I hear heavy, rhythmic footsteps. I panic and try to flee, but the pain from the earlier blows is crippling. I attempt to drag myself with my arms and crawl into a hiding spot, but the effort is fruitless. So I sit, legs spread out, hoping for the best, but expecting the worst.

A man approaches me. He wears heavy garments and holds a rifle in his hand. My eyes fill with tears. 'The enemy,' I think. 'Is he going to hurt me?' But I soon notice that this was the same man, or figure, that had previously saved me from those boys. Remaining silent, the soldier approaches me. I didn't fully trust him, yet something in his eyes signaled to me that he meant no harm. So, I allowed him to continue walking towards me. The man kneels down and places his rifle on the ground. At this point, I get a better view of his face. He has a calm and sympathetic disposition, unlike any I have ever seen from the sneering fronts of our enemies. The soldier appears young; perhaps in his late 20's? Nevertheless, I lower my guard down. He takes a roll of bandaging tape and begins to unravel it. Wrapping up my wound, he smiles tenderly. I squirm a bit. "There you go."

A few moments of silence. The man tries to conversate with me. I guess he had not yet realized I was mute. Luckily, I find a nearby rock and manage to scribble on the large concrete floor.

*Thank you. For saving me and tending to my injury.*

"Your welcome," responded the soldier. "I'm assuming you're mute?"

*Yes.*



"You must've been through some tough times. How are you holding up?"

*Fine, thanks to you. A few more seconds and I would have been dead.*

He laughs. I smile. "Your name?"

*James. James Hill.*

"Interesting. Your parents?"

*Dead. Father was drafted to war, and my Mother died from an explosion.*

My smile fades. He pats me on the head, just like my father and mother used to do. "It's okay. You're safe now."

For the first time since the deaths of my parents, I *truly* feel safe. "Let's go outside and get some food. You must be hungry by now." I nod and drop the rock. He helps me up, and we walk to the door. I take a step on the snow. And then tragedy struck again, just as I found my haven.

A soldier approaches us with a harsh demeanor. 'An enemy..' He stares at my new friend and asks, "Where have you been? And what the hell are you doing with that enemy?!" My friend responds, "He's hurt. Please, just leave us be." "NO," said the other soldier firmly. "That boy has been putting things in your head!" He then pulls out his rifle and points it at me. My friend says, "James, run," with a serious tone. But I am frozen.

An explosion directed at me. In that split second, my dear friend, oh, my dear friend, jumped in front of me and took the bullet. Crash. The snow is now red.

Disbelief. Anger. And deep suffering. These emotions conflict inside of me as I kneel beside my friend. Once more, I cry and stare with resentment at the soldier. Realizing what he'd done, he then shoots me before running off. And then I lay beside my friend. He is fading. So am

I. But I feel at ease. Peace envelops me like a warm blanket. I turn towards the man who saved me. "Thank you."

He turns towards me. He smiles, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"James," he says. "I'll see you on the other side, buddy."

And then his eyes close so tranquilly.

I stare at the snowy sky. "Yes, I'll see you too." I grasp his hand, and my eyes flutter shut.

Blank space and no pain. All I see is snow and my Mother and Father.

And I run, run to them. The snow is firm and soft like a pillow. In a million years, I never thought this would happen. We all start crying, our warm hearts embracing one another as we hug. "My son," they say with joyous spirits. "We love you."

"I love you too." And then it occurred to me. "For the first time since your deaths, I spoke." I could not believe it. "Yes, we've been watching over you, and your angel." I felt so happy. This was a reunion, one that could last.

My angel, my friend, then appears from behind them. I run up to him with Mother and Father by my side, gracefully stepping on the snow. "Never would I have imagined that the enemy my school once taught us to fear would become a brother to me." He smiles that beam of his, and we all hug, our hearts overflowing with joy as the pure snow glistens, now, and will do so forever.