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I hide behind a facade of tranquility as an ever growing fire burns inside of me. What was once a smoldering ember now consumes all. I lie to myself day after day, in hopes that I will one day believe it and be blind to the truth. I make valiant efforts to direct my energy into art, literature, and the promotion of peace, but it is all in vain. There is a monster raging inside of me, who blurs my vision. I have become engulfed in fog. For moments I have but a brief glimpse of clarity. I desire to return to the earth, for which there must be a way. I have grown tired of the ebb and flow of time washing over my sins, as the waves crashing on the beach. For I am a mountain, no sooner shall I be at ease until the ocean has turned me into sand. The release of my hatred only quells the sea, and for an eternity my soul is betwixt to this plane. I was born under the right stars but in the wrong realm, I am lost. A vagabond with no name. I was not always so lost though, there was a time when my life had an undeniable purpose. Life was simple and as the sun rose I found myself enveloped in perpetual darkness, listening to the succession of thuds, creeping along in twos. One... Two... One... Two... Growing exponentially louder and faster. What was once a mere thud is now concussions. Shaking my very existence. The succession has become a constant rhythm, One Two, One Two, One Two, Screeching to a Halt it stops. As an artillery round making contact with the earth a flash of blinding light and I gasp for air, groping for life. My heart is beating through my chest and my ears. The world around me is blurred as though looking through a window covered in water, brief shapes and colors but details lost. The breathing stops and the chest heaves with the strength to pull down a mountain. Panic, I can't stop, I can't stop... At last it pulls, and clean crisp air enters the lungs again, life has never felt so important, never have I clung to the minuscule detail of breathing. As my vision starts to clear I can hear the crunching, grinding, tearing of 100 feet through the gravel and sand. Shouting, short high-pitched screams and long, drawn out, deep baritone diaphragms. Rhythms of the voice, ear shattering bellows from the flesh. My throat is dry and cracking, like the bottom of a drought ridden lakebed. To the corners of my lips cling the coagulated remnants of what was once saliva. My eyes burn. From the barren heat and the salt that ever pours into them, streaming off of my brow. I can not possibly rub them off on my sleeve or with my hand, for I am all but drenched in it. My legs are wobbling and shaking as I start to stand, with a burst of energy I throw myself from the ground to my feet. I see the faces, the faces of weary souls passing by me, not a glimpse of life in them but they continue on. Trudging, pushing, fighting. Behind them walk those who have no heart. Glares and stares void of any passion, as they continue on without a single ounce of concern for them selves. And a gurgling diesel engine meandering behind them. Familiar Pattern Sounds meeting my ear, what could only be my name. My name is faintly heard on the cries of those to the front. With a grain of courage I push off, my legs are shaking but I push, my heart is pounding but I push, my lungs are collapsing but I push, my face is torrid but I push on and on. Finally my gaze is sighting in to those at the front. Such speed with which they carry themselves. I'll never reach them, and I know this. My heart sinks, plummeting through the void of my soul. My eyes are stricken down, to the very earth from which I rose. Pushing on I wish only to return to the soil and sand. For a moment I look up, with hopes to catch a glimpse of those brave few at the front. There they are fading from my line of sight, when two or three look behind and my gaze meets theirs. I see delighted cheer from their warn and exhausted faces. My name is called by them. Encouraging me to carry on. I'm certain that I have nothing left but I push on, every muscle through my leg trembles with each impact of every step and yet I carry on. My advance becomes more swift with every step, the heaving breaths turn way for fluid friction on my face. I push on, faster and faster my legs cary me, never stopping. I reach those strong few at the front, such repletion surging through me. A slap on the back and we push together. My pain is nullified by tenacity.

“U.A. I want to go, but they won’t let me go… U.A. I want to go home!”

I keep repeating the words in my head, our platoon has moved on to a new cadence, something about “watching the green grass blow,” I hate this damn cadence. I remember a couple years ago I had a Staff Sergeant scold me for trying to sing it because (and I could damn near quote this) I had no “soul.” That shit hurt, I mean I’ve been yelled at and straight up reamed by more people than I can count, but that kind of hit home for me. We had literally just been singing about “picking cotton and tossing hay.” I’m not one to usually point out racial injustices, but I’m pretty sure what he meant was, “you’re too white to sing this cadence.” Motherfucker, I know I can sing, last time we were all singing the hymn I was the loudest motherfucker out there! First Sergeant even told me so! Granted she called me Daily. Daily, Brady, fuck it, it’s all Irish right? I knew what she meant, and so did everybody else. Fuck that guy anyway, jack ass trying to tell me I can’t sing. Fuck him, what does he know? The guy got busted down to Corporal for beating his wife or sleeping with Junior Marines or some shit not long after anyway.

Left foot, Right foot, Lef… This goddamn pack won’t stay on my back. Left foot, Right foot, Left foot, Righ… I hate this fucking rifle sling, I guess it’s better than a parade sling. Parade slings, who was the dumb fuck who thought it would be a good idea to hump with those in the first place? Left foot, Right foot, Left foot… Seriously, I’m fucking sick of humping. 15 miles, Fifteen fucking miles around this shit hole of a base. CO be lying to us about these damn humps, saying they’re “training for deployment.” You know the guy’s lying to all of us. We’re a POG unit that supports the base. We’ve been one for the 3 years that I’ve been here and we were one for 4 years before I got here. The only way any of these poor fucking Devils are getting on a deployment is if they get Temporarily Assigned to a new Unit. I mean that’s how I got on mine, along with all the other mechanics and operators. What the fuck are we humping for anyway? Like not just me being a mechanic and shit, but we’re motherfucking Moter-T! We have more than 100 trucks in our motor pool, trust me. I’ve replaced the oil and scrubbed the brake drums of every one of those fuckers with a goddamned wire brush. Left foot, Right foot, fuck this, Left foot, Right foot, this is bull shit, Left foot, Right foot, Left foot, I understand Sergeant that you want to be a Drill Instructor but you could learn a new fucking cadence? Left foot, Right foot… \*sigh\*…

Every day is a new line of bull shit, like would it really kill somebody if we had a set schedule? I know “adapt and overcome” I get it, but this is horse shit. I’m pretty sure if I were a civilian and I had some jack ass call me after I got off of work to tell me I was going on a 15 mile hike and I had to be up at the ass-crack-of dawn at the armory with a pack full of bullshit I’ll never use and a full combat load I would straight up tell him to go eat a bag of dicks. Hell, I’d even find one and shove the first one down his fucking throat. I know for a fact some of these people have family and kids, do you hate them so much that you would rather stay at work for the rest of your life? Seriously.

Every day I think about going U.A. I even researched countries that don’t expedite prisoners, I mean shit, if I’m going to go AWOL I don’t want to get caught and get hauled back to the fucking Brig. I have no intentions of going to prison, but Military Prison? You’re fucking high if you think I’ll ever let myself end up there. That being said, I did almost go U.A. once. Unauthorized Absence. Man I was close. I had my rifle on the ground and a hand and foot ready to hop the damn fence. Kyrgyzstan is a beautiful country. The city of Bishkek was hardly a couple of miles away, gorgeous Asian women that spoke some variant of the Russian language, I imagined meeting a nice gal, having a family. The city and base lied at the foot of these mountains whose peaks scraped the very sky itself, like I thought Wyoming was beautiful, but this place was heavenly! I took my foot off the fence and picked up my rifle. With one hand on the fence I drove my gaze upwards. For being a winter night there was hardly a cloud in the sky, but you could see them rolling in. The stars were amazing. My uncle was in Vietnam, he had all kinds of buddies that went for it, my grandfather was in WW 2, the same for him. But accountability wasn’t the same back in the day, they’d have my ass in some prison before I ever even made it to a bar and ordered a beer. Hmmm.

As the snow started falling I dropped my head and stared at the ground, dropping my hand from the fence I started trudging through the snow, my trod down beat. And my dreams of something better all but shattered I spoke these words; “I am an N.C.O. dedicated to training new Marines and influencing the old, I am forever conscious of each Marine under my charge and by example will inspire them to the highest standards possible. I will strive to be patient, understanding, just, and firm. I will condemn the deserving and encourage the wayward. I will never forget that I am responsible to my Commanding Officer for the moral, discipline, and efficiency of my Marines, and their performance will reflect an image of me.”

This creed was my whole existence, my purpose for waking up in the morning. Repeating those words meant more to me than earning my Eagle, Globe, and Anchor. It meant more to me than any promotion, or any time I came home. It meant that I would take care of my Marines no matter what, and in doing so I would train them in my image. I really cared for my Marines as well, and many of them looked up to me, something I never really understood. Well, my Marines in the rear that is. My Marines in country fucking hated me, and to be honest I don’t really blame them. I was a fucking asshole. I mean, they really hated me, loathed even. They would write graffiti in the porta-shitters about me, “Brady Suks Big Black Cok.” Ummm, first of all, no I fucking don’t. Second of all, fuck you, you illiterate, undisciplined, worthless fuck. That whole unit was straight garbage. Like real talk, I used to love the Marine Corps before I came to that unit. Don’t get me wrong, that unit was responsible for doing a lot of fucking work, like we got shit done in country. But that Unit is what’s wrong with the Marine Corps. N.C.O.’s hung out with Junior Marines, Junior Marines had no respect when speaking to their superiors, they would argue when given orders, or just straight up not do what they were told. Straight Garbage. It was like working with the fucking Army or some shit… well maybe not that bad, I mean we still PT’d and had some form of height and weight standards. Seriously the Army is disgusting as fuck, every time you look at them it looks like they just pulled their uniform out of the laundry bin, or out from the bottom of some bag. Like seriously, just take some fucking pride in your image. It never mattered how fucking dirty I got, my cover was always starched and on point, and my uniform was as clean as the environment allowed. Every time I saw one of those shitbag’s they were covered in soil. Call it good camouflage if you want, but I’d say they’re just straight lazy.

My Marines in the rear loved me though, and I them. They knew me for years. They witnessed first-hand the arduous labor I put into everything, they saw me work for everything. They knew I wasn’t just another power-hungry jack ass, I turned down promotions because I wanted to know my job and my Marines better. Everything meant something. Government rule had this simplicity in it, the bureaucratic current was like Stalin’s wet dream. Everything was smooth and sound, everybody got everything done. Sure there was a little bit of questionable activities that took place, but for the most part, the majority of the time, it was a perfect system.