



A WWII LOVE STORY

my DEAREST BEV

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Chapter Thirteen: Belgium, Late December, 1944, Battle of the Bulge

(Bob)

The forest was silent in the way that makes a man's skin crawl. Bob's breath came in ragged clouds, freezing instantly on the edges of his scarf. Every tree looked like a shadow waiting to move, every bend in the road a potential ambush. The woven grey wool socks Bev had sent kept his toes warmer. How lucky I am he thought as there were others whose toes were just about froze off.

The German counteroffensive had hit like a storm. Orders were confusing, maps unreadable, and the ground itself seemed to resist... the mud clinging to boots, guns slipping from frozen fingers. Bob trudged forward with his unit, each step heavy, each thought a calculation between hope and survival.

He thought of Bev. He always did, even in the briefest pauses, when a shell exploded in the distance or a buddy muttered a prayer under his breath. The letters she had sent, the package, the photograph of her he kept in his back pocket were memories he could hold in his mind, comforting shapes in the chaos. The thing that brought him



peace for a brief moment in the explosion around him.

There's soldiers being flung from trenches, shots being fired every wear. Bob immediately tried to head for cover. Seeing the soldier next to him life less, still with no breath. His skin pale he only thought of his family back home knowing they'll have to face the tragic truth that their son, husband, brother died a hero but did not make it home. That thought sent chills down Bob's spine. He couldn't bear the thought of his parents or Bev having to face that news. A still Bob Cardinal watched a bullet wiz by his head. Snapping back into reality he ducked back into the trenches.

Food was scarce. Rest was rarer. Messages home were nearly impossible. Mail had been disrupted weeks ago; no one knew when it might resume. It gnawed at him, the inability to reach her, to assure her that he was alive. Only wondering what could possibly be running through her mind right now. Knowing she must be worried.

In the evenings, when he could steal a moment, he wrote fragments in his journal. The half sort of letters he hoped would survive the journey, notes about the landscape, the civilians they passed, the quiet bravery of his comrades. The thoughts and things he didn't dare send to Bev. The dark thoughts that crept in when all goes silent.

He never sent them some he never planned to. Not yet. There was no time, no way, not while the forest seemed to move with enemy eyes and artillery screamed through the night.

A flicker of humor sometimes cut through the terror. One of the men, shivering in soaked boots, Bob huddled in a shallow trench that night, the stars above pale through the smoke and frost. He traced the edges of the photo he kept tucked in his back pocket as he took it out and he felt the smooth paper between his fingers. Bev, he thought, if you could see this, if you knew we were still alive...

Sleep was impossible. The ground cold and hard, the wind unrelenting. But he closed his eyes, imagining Ogdensburg, Seymour Street, the glow of St. Mary's candles in the cold December night. He whispered a prayer for himself, for his friends, and for the girl waiting across the ocean who believed in him and their future together.

And in that quiet, impossible place, Bob found a small measure of peace, clinging to hope, clinging to love, and waiting for the day he could finally write to her again.