

## The Mighty Fallen, the Weapons of War Perished

by Maggie

There is nothing the will cannot overcome. Jonathan tells himself this as he assumes the first position, cradling the rifle in his arms, staring down the paper target pinned to the bale of hay. He leans back till his sacrum screams, pulls the trigger and watches three shots disappear into the soft summer straw. He thinks, with a wave of disgust, of the girl under the apple tree, of himself under the apple tree, of her white legs under her white skirt. He assumes the second position, sinking to one knee. Adjusts his grip on the rifle. Three more shots. The recoil hurts like a bitch. Her white clavicle under her blouse. Her blonde hair down her neck. He wants to throw up. Final position. Prone on the ground. He swallows down the bile in his throat. Three more shots.

By the time he gets back home from the hayfields the sun has set. David is waiting for him on the front step, smoking a cigarette he got off his older brother in the army. David wants to join the army, he says so. David's mother won't let him smoke. Jonathan doesn't give a damn about the army. He just wants to hit the target as dead-on as he can. David watches him take apart the rifle and lock it up in the shed. "Where've you been?"

Jonathan says nothing. David follows him inside, up to his bedroom with the sloping ceiling. David talks. Jonathan listens to David talk about getting into the army, and the city, and his brother's letters, and the girls in the city and getting into the girls in the city. There is only one chair. David is sitting on Jonathan's bed. Jonathan wants to maul him. He wishes he hadn't put the rifle away.

Every day since, he frightens the memory of the girl under the apple tree away with his triplets. Three shots. Three positions. Three distances. When his fingers ache and his shoulder bruises and his ears ring he won't remember it. He still goes to school. He sits next to David and David sits next to him. But they don't talk, not like the used to, because now people talk about Jonathan, and maybe David does too, Jonathan doesn't care. First position.

The boys pass around a postcard of a naked woman. Jonathan reads his textbook with his head down, hair falling onto the page about how Napoleon dies. Second position.

He lies awake and looks out the slanted window. The fields are still out there. First thing tomorrow he will be out there. He lies on his back and imagines living in barracks, the horror of bodies. Third position.

The girl under the apple tree is the first. He is standing over her, because she took the short way and got there before him. She had undone the ribbon around her neck and taken off her shoes. He feels this first shot in his stomach. When she looks up at him he knows he would rather be dead than watch her brush away her blonde hair like she expects something from him.

Second is a girl David meets with at the lake, a girl with freckles all along her body, everywhere on her body. She isn't even wearing a ribbon when she jumps in the water, laughing. David doesn't leave her alone. The girl is his, his girl doesn't stop laughing. They are both laughing and Jonathan slinks away.

It is David who fires the third shot. Catches Jonathan staring at the painting in the old abbey of Saint Sebastian shot through with arrows like a thirteen-point doe. Catches Jonathan. Catches. Catches Jonathan staring. Jonathan runs.

They are at the lake and Jonathan is staring. He is staring at the wrong thing, not at the center of the target. He will lose points. He will be caught.

Jonathan runs. Puts distance between him and him. He stands on the steps, alone, goes up to his room. Rips off the sheets.

He gets the rifle. At the end of the summer there will be a contest, a national contest. He will compete three shots three positions three distances. He runs the meters fifty hundred hundredfifty two hundred two hundredfifty and he is in the hayfields. At the end of the summer there will be no hay left. He will shoot three and three and three and David will join the army.

It is dawn or it is dusk. He does not sleep anymore. When he sleeps he does not dream. He does not dream of the girl under the apple tree or the girl with freckles all over her body. He dreams of Saint Sebastian shot through like a doe.

He stands in the hayfield dreaming.

It will be simple and short. He has three bullets, needs only one. He is a good shot, he tells himself. Do this and then there will be nothing. He will do this or there is nothing. Saint Sebastian was holy, he learned. There was nothing he could do but be martyred, a martyr. Even holy Sebastian shot through can mount no defense. And Jonathan is less than holy—less than anything. Less than a soldier and less than a girl with freckles and ribbons. He slides the bullet into the chamber. He is watching the sun rise or set. Final position, final distance.

There is nothing—the will cannot overcome.