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Eden

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Eden

Author Bio

Liam Hamilton is a sophomore Classics major at Gettysburg College. Living about 20 minutes outside of Philadelphia in Delaware County, he's enjoyed writing his entire life but never pursued much of it until he took a Creative Writing class in high school. This sparked his interest to continue writing in college, ranging from fiction to non-fiction, often based on the stories that have affected his life.

Eden

Elijah knelt beneath a bunker, his youthful hands shaking as they improperly grasped a poorly manufactured rifle. Shots rang in front of him, beside him, and behind him. His mind was racing, unable to focus on anything. The dark sky hid the bullets that flew across the warzone, narrowly missing his unstrapped helmet. He couldn't tell whether the screams he heard were ones of agony or of generals yelling commands. Peeking just above the blood-soaked bunker, he made out the enemy lines faintly through the fog, watching dark silhouettes charging and dropping as soon as they leaped beyond the safety of the dirt trap. A bullet whizzed into Elijah's uniform while another revealed his dark brown hair as it collided with his helmet, which landed calmly below. Elijah's panicking mind brought his hand to his wound, gushing red while his rifle escaped his hand's grip, sticking into the dirt. Sitting with his back to the wall, his mind reached for the thoughts of his newly born son, his wife, his family, until his widened eyes peered to his right, meeting the gaze of his dead friend.

Elijah stood on the wooden planks outside the front door of his house, gazing across the vast expanse of sand. His small town was located in northern Turkey, surrounded by hues of yellow and brown. These two colors engulfed the town, from the mountains and hills on the horizon, to the sturdy wooden poles holding up the roofs of the houses. The sun's rays relentlessly struck the village, forcing most of its occupants inside to escape the heat. Elijah's black shirt fit loosely around his person, the fabric swaying back and forth as he limped forward, out from the safety of his awning, and into the heat.

Elijah grasped his cane with both of his hands, the golden metal head connecting to the black wooden rod digging into the ground, following the path established by his previous walks along the rough ground. He soon stepped into a vast forest of color, a luscious green garden, despite the conditions of the scorched town. Not many people of the town could grow such gardens in the unfertile ground. The light brown earth was always either too dry or too rough to properly grow plants, yet Elijah found a way to make peace with the land, producing baskets after baskets of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Rows of red, purple, orange, even spots of blue and pink, decorated the carefully crafted garden. The tall vines wrapped around wooden poles, rough leaves sticking out of the intertwined stalks. Elijah merged into the colors, his brown dress shoes soaked in mud and water. He waddled through the vines until a large, red fruit grabbed his eyes. Reaching out, his shaky hands clutched the smooth tomato. Ignoring the increasing heat of the blasting sun, he knelt into the wet dirt, his eyes swishing left and right, inspecting the captive produce.

A roar of footsteps pulled Elijah away from the fruit, planting his eyes on the hill just beyond the village. Carefully releasing the tomato, he began pushing his cane deeper into the dirt, hoisting himself upright. His hand rested just above his eyes, providing the proper shade as he squinted, looking closer at the hill. Soldiers clad in camouflage sprinted down the hills, sand kicking up beneath their military boots. The few residents remaining in the heat quickly

broke for their houses, panicked faces rushing for a false safety. The soldiers grew closer and closer, escaping the dangerous sand and entering the comfort and serenity of Elijah's garden.

Firmly standing, both hands still wrapped around his cane, Elijah frowned as the heavily clad soldiers marched closer toward him. The soldier who looked like leader of the group lifted his hands, manipulating his fingers and arm movements to give various signals without speaking a word. His sunglasses reflected the sun toward Elijah as he paced forward, his left hand gripping the downward-facing rifle. His frown matched Elijah's, his eyes staring intensely. Elijah's focus was drawn to the other soldiers, who began to spread out, some banging on the wooden doors, others taking aim and firing at the frames and forcing themselves into the stone homes of his fellow townspeople. His attempt toward them was stopped by the soldier's strong, gloved hands, gently pushing him back to meet his unpleasant gaze.

"I'll take it you don't remember me," the soldier's voice was rough as he spoke up, his feet shuffling in place. The gloved hands of the man grasped his blackened glasses, removing them from his scarred face. The blue eyes of the leader focused intently on Elijah. The soldier's face twisted more uncomfortably as his eyes seemingly grew angrier. "Well? Nothing? It's only been a few years, old man!"

Elijah's bones ached throughout the day, making the mornings even more difficult to rise out of the comfort of the sheets on his mattress. Scars were tattered along his uncovered arms, brutal reminders of his militaristic past. Eyes half-closed, he gazed at his night table, toward a small golden jar, containing the ashes of his wife. His hands reached out, feeling the cold, smooth surface of the object. Breathing deeply in, he heaved himself out of bed as he exhaled. His shuffling feet slowly paced through the interior of the house as Elijah mindlessly moved toward the kitchen. The natural light and smell of fresh vegetables growing in his newly formed garden were not waking him up this time. A headline on a newspaper caught his attention, sticking out from the usual dark brown of the chairs and table: "Turkish Economy Boom as Oil Trade with U.S. Increases." He disappointedly glances through the article, eyeing key words and phrases, such as "millions of dollars" and "oil dependency." His eyebrows slowly furrow together as he absorbs and processes more of the article. Those wars he fought in, were they truly just for more negotiations with foreign countries?

"People just can't seem to find peace with what they have anymore," Elijah grumbles out the side of mouth, turning and folding the pages in the print.

Slipping out from the newspaper, a white sheet landed on the tiled kitchen floor. His tired hands, covered in small cuts from the thorns in his garden, lazily swipe up the paper as his eyes dash through the markings along the page. *I'm out, old man. I told you this would happen, now that I'm finally old enough. I know you said "no military work," but you can't stop me. Maybe you're through with this fighting, but I'm not. Ma passed because our "allies" couldn't send backup in time. This town, this country, this whole planet is disgusting. Your stinking garden can't fix anything, but I can, whether you want me to or not.* His eyes could not prevent the overflow of tears approaching. *I'll go somewhere they'll take me in as the soldier I was born to be. Sitting here in this trashy town won't do nothing*

toward helping that. For both of our sakes, let's hope we don't see each other for a while. Your son...

"Noah?!" The name rushed out of Elijah's mouth, breaking the momentary silence. Elijah gazed at his son, standing tall before him, impatiently swaying his rifle back and forth.

"Bingo," Noah responded, pulling the rifle over his shoulder, re-covering his eyes with the sunglasses. Elijah's mouth hung slightly open, his mind not quite comprehending the scenario. Noah angrily glared longer at Elijah. "Well, hope you've been good, I've been just swell." Noah brought the gun back across his torso, his right hand gripping underneath the front of the device. "Now, I've some work to do. Some of your workers in this town aren't seemin' to get the importance oil has to good ol' Uncle Sam." Quickly turning and running brutishly through the garden and toward the center of town, he began to shout some military jargon, words like charlie, foxtrot, tango. Words that Elijah once knew the meanings of by heart but now barely recognized, his hand extended toward where Noah once stood. The unbearable silence only brought him more distress.

As Noah disappeared behind a building, rapid gunfire rang out; however, these sounds were not reciprocated with the breaking of a wooden frame or stone wall—rather these sounds were accompanied with yells of terror. Elijah jumped as his heart began thumping faster and faster. Regaining his state of mind, he slowly made his way forward, his soiled shoes kicking up dirt and sand as he reached the edge of his garden. He noticed dead plants, trampled and crushed, the insides of fruits and vegetables scattered as the footprints of boots layered on top of the unpolished food. He felt pained and saddened, but he ignored his ruined work and continued making his way out to the center of town.

His pace hastened as he pulled around the crumbling corner of one of the stone houses, peering into the middle of the simple town. Soldiers of light brown and green shades pushed violently on the loosely clad folk of the town, but the sheer number of the citizens overwhelmed them as a circle formed around one remaining soldier. Pushing his cane even more violently into the ground, Elijah worriedly hurried forward, his muscles aching as he pushed himself.

Noah stood in the center, his black rifle aimed at two men, a woman, and a child, bruised and collapsed on the ground. His sunglasses hid his piercing eyes, yet his gaze was more frightening to the endangered family than his weapon's barrel. Shaking and sobbing, the family held their hands up, pleading for the soldier to reconsider his actions. Elijah carefully eased through the crowd, using his small stature to slip around the citizens, eventually breaking the imagined line separating Noah from the people of the town. A disappointed sigh escaped his mouth as he saw his son shouting incoherently at the family. His cane fell to the sand, the metal head shining half as bright as the sand surrounded the object. His trembling arms were stretched outright, his lopsided, black shirt coated in sweat as he inched closer to the place in between Noah and the victims.

"Noah, son, what are you doing?" Elijah's calm voice hushed the uproar of the pleading crowd, yet Noah held no restraint in his actions. "Noah, after all these years have passed, you must remember all I've told you... These wars are not for me nor for you." Elijah continued to move closer, his face pained from

his hustle. "I've missed you so; can we not at least talk?" Noah's emotionless and unmoving response prompted Elijah to continue pushing forward, eventually placing himself between his son and the threatened family. "Noah, I thought you wanted peace..."

The circular crowd was separated as soldiers shoved and forced their way through. Elijah turned to look toward them, his quivering hands lowering from exhaustion. The heat belted down on him more and more, sweat pouring down his face. As he glanced back at Noah, he saw that his son had aimed his weapon away from the family and now at him.

"You never quite understood war, old man." Noah heaved the rifle backwards, then thrust it forward into Elijah's stomach. Elijah was knocked off of his feet and onto the rough sand below him. Gasping for breath, he gripped his stomach. His shut eyes saw only darkness, but his ears picked up short bursts of gunfire. The pain in his stomach grew unbearable. Screams for help rang out even louder than his own gasps for breath. The heat was the least of his concern, but its intensity could not be ignored. Blurred people dashed all around him as hidden soldiers fired left and right, some pushing members of the crowd down and others running back to regroup. The pure sand around him was soon painted red. His widened eyes rapidly surveyed the area, eventually meeting the gaze of the murdered family behind him.

Gasping even harder for breath, Noah's black silhouette covered the sun in front of him, providing momentary relief from the rays. Noah knelt down, reaching inside his padded and bloodied uniform. He pulled out a golden necklace, shining in the sunlight, with a heavy cross dangling on the end. Roughly pulling Elijah's hands off of his stomach, his strong fingers forced Elijah's weak palm open, placing the cold golden chain in his hands. Noah frowned, his teeth showing, as streaks of red were splattered across his face. He glared back toward Elijah, the sun peaking beyond his unstrapped helmet.

"You better hope for salvation, old man. You'll need it more than I will." Noah sadly stared at Elijah's face, which grew increasingly more pained and uncomfortable. "I was hoping I wouldn't run into you here. This oil, it's just like our, uh...our forbidden fruit, so to say. So well, let's just hope this doesn't happen again...and, uh, sorry about your garden..." Staring into nothingness, Elijah's eyes slightly swayed back and forth. Frowning, Noah turned, yelling back to his troops more military words that Elijah didn't have the time or ability to make out. His head falling back onto the sand, he caught Noah returning to his feet and running out of the view of his collapsed head, as the blue sky and town turned from hues of yellow and brown to complete darkness.