Sins

 The full moon glowed bright as I continued to run through the muddy, dark path leading to the back of my house from the forest. I looked back in horror hearing another round of bullets come towards me. But neither the shouts nor the bullets would stop me from getting the real people I loved and wouldn’t let go. I pulled back the bolt on the wooden door and pushed the door, closing it without wait behind me. Running, I still heard the shouts and bullets coming from behind, the German now meaning nothing to me, for this was the language of the people I now hate.

Two weeks earlier.

The rockets continued to smash into the rock as the soldiers continued to run up the beach and shoot, most of them dying. I’d never seen so much blood. The beach was covered with blood, guts and bodies as well as the tank blockers – the famous pieces that were made to look like a diagonal cross, but to most of us it just reminded us all of our symbol, however with just the very ends cut off. I stood in a stone building, on one of the turrets by the narrow gaps in the wall. It was seven o’clock by then and yet the soldiers just kept on coming, we’d been told that this fleet was the Americans, none of us had a clue why it was just the Americans that were invading, none of us had a clue where the British were, for all we knew this would just be a distraction. But if they were invading the Americans definitely wouldn’t be the distraction, the American’s pets – The British – would definitely be the distraction.

At that moment we wouldn’t let any of them conquer through our Atlantic Wall. However this thought was short lived as a shout from behind us shocked everyone in the building. The three of us looked behind to see to our terror a Yank holding an assault rifle. We all let go of our turrets and I instinctively reached down to the ground for the pistol that had stayed still for one straight hour while I’d been keeping my hands full on the turret. I looked up raising my gun as well as my body and fired. I had been too late though. The soldier furthest away from me had been shot in the head while I saw the Yank’s gun pointing toward my close friend, Hans.

I fired the gun with no hesitation. “Duck!” I yelled in German. The Yank fell back but as he did and as I suspected a final bullet fired from his gun, him hoping that still in his death he would do his best to help the cause. The bullet fired through the gap in the wall and I grabbed Hans’ hand, preparing to run out of the building. Taking no time to waste I began to sprint alongside Hans. We both ran through the hole that was meant to be the entrance to the building and to our amazement and shock both of us were sent flying down hard to the brown, muddy floor as the building behind us erupted into flames.

Suddenly the flames died down and the front of the building began to crumble down the cliff, eventually taking the rest of the building with it. A loud roar came from my right and as I looked I saw another Yank with his assault rifle poised. I raised my pistol quickly and fired. Hurriedly, we got up from our lying position and began where we left off, heading down a long, muddy field. However as we did this something disturbed my panicking mind and the number 100 continued to repeat itself. Then I realised. 100. This was now the number of people’s lives that I had taken, most I didn’t even know. No one knew. And yet any person I knew would kill them for our cause, not seeming to care about them. All that stayed in their minds was the knowing thought that when we won the war they wouldn’t be part of the superior race that we had been informed about for a decade.

Hans and I ran up the field, our lives the only thing that mattered to us. But our lives didn’t matter to them – the enemy – and so the bullet entered the centre of Hans’ back. He fell face down onto the muddy floor, letting go of my hand and almost his life. I turned around and fired three times at the two soldiers that stood several metres away. Both of them fell to the floor and I knelt down, turning Hans’ limp body over. Blood poured out of his mouth and his eyes remained fixated on the same place in the sky, his body as pale as an angel. He didn’t deserve this. He didn’t deserve to die like this. He didn’t deserve to die at all. And yet the 102 people I had killed didn’t deserve to die. But in this world in this time, anybody will do anything to save their own life. The gladiator’s stage never stops producing its performers, and its performers never stop producing.

However I couldn’t leave my best friend’s side, God knows what they would do to his body after what we’ve done to them and their people. I picked his limp body up and over my shoulders and ran. I ran as fast as I could across the terribly muddy field. When I reached the end I leaped over a luckily small fence and bush, not stopping for I knew now that if I were to stop, I were to die. I was at a T-Junction. I decided to go the way any man would go, forward.

A sail of black spread over France and I arrived at a barn on the way to a small village called Balleroy, as I had seen on a sign earlier. I dropped the body of Hans into a puddle of mud, knowing he wouldn’t mind under the circumstances. I knocked on the four metre high wooden door. “Bonjour?” I yelled in my best French accent. A yellow light illuminated through the gaps in the doors and to my thankfulness an old, frail woman wearing what seemed to just look like rags and holding a lamp with a candle lit up the middle, stretched out to my face.

“Hello? Sorry I don’t speak French.” The woman said, and to my surprise in German. Another thing to surprise me was that she hadn’t had noticed Hans’ body, with dried blood covering his face and all over his clothes.

“Can I spend the night, please, I will explain all.” I pleaded, replying in German.

“Oh of course, any guest is welcome in my house, especially a German man like you. May I ask what has brought you to Balleroy?” she said, seeming to struggle toward her rocking chair. The woman straightened her frail arm out to point the rocking chair opposite.

“It is a long story ma’am.” I said, lifting Hans’ body off of the floor and into the barn. Candles illuminated the barn house, with the distant cry of sheep and cows, I felt pleasantly at peace with myself for once.

“Oh please, tell all.”

“It started a few months ago; I got a promotion to work at one of the Jew Relocation Centres…” I struggled to continue, fearing my past and fearing the thought of people I had known who only now had pasts. “Do you know what they did?” I paused as I felt a tear drop out of my right eye and fall down my damp cheek. “Do you know what I did?”

“Oh I’m sure it’s not too bad, and anyway if you haven’t noticed I’m blind, but yes I did notice the dead body you brought into my house, I do have very good hearing, and um… smell.” The woman said to me her voice fluctuating between compassion and subtle discontent.

“You don’t know a thing?” I shouted out, shocked. “Well I suppose you’re lucky.” I admitted. “They kill them. They’ve killed millions of them, and I wasn’t able to do a thing. Do you know how that feels? Do you? To be responsible for hundreds of deaths, preventable deaths.”

“What? Why? When? How did this happen?” the woman cried.

“I worked in Westerbork, there we would keep Jews and the others that we… they hated. And once a train came we would send them off to other camps where they would either be killed or forced to work.”

“How do you know this?”

“Because I went to one of the other camps. I was forced on a train to Bergen-Belsen, it was the worst thing imaginable, but there were far worse things to come.”

December 7th 1943.

I stood inside a 10 metre long carriage, in the corner by a narrow window around a metre long, the light shining in my eyes while I watched and guarded the dozens of other people in my wooden wagon. Not a single minute went without a cough or a groan or a gasp for air. I guessed that we would be to the camp soon. But already 4 people had died due to the suffocation. For I was the most powerful in the room so I deserved to have the air and the light – that’s what I thought, then.

Once we arrived, two more people had died, but from what I estimated at least half of the people who had been in my cabin were to die while at the camp. I got out of the train and saw the scramble that this system was. Families were being ripped apart, the children were forced into a group and their mothers attempted to look after them. However, most mothers were torn apart from their most loved ones. As I stood I saw three young girls screaming as two guards forced the trio from their mother, the mother tried to resist as another guard got hold of her. The newly arrived guard reached for a pistol tucked into his trousers and swiftly raised the gun to the mother’s head and fired, all in the space of two seconds.

The area fell silent. Apart from the screams from the children, no one else dared a word. “What? She was going to die anyway.” The guard said, smug. The guard next to him nervously laughed, fearing what else might happen at the hands of the guard. “Now, shut those kids up before I shoot them as well.”

I had been at the camp for 2 days, 2 days it took me to realise the terror of what was happening to millions, 2 more days of being away from my family, 2 more days dreading what I would have to watch each day. But as I adapted to my new life and my new surroundings, I had a new place to cope. I had been ordered into one of the huts that our prisoners were kept. So at 9 o’clock on Thursday the 9th of December I entered the horror an acquaintance of hell.

I opened the wooden door to reveal a smell equivalent to poison and a sight that would make the Devil smile with joy. I wore a gas mask alongside my uniform that covered all of my body. My socks were stretched as high as they possibly could and my vest and shirt underneath my main uniform were tucked in all around the rim of my trousers. Terrible coughs greeted me alongside those who weren’t yet sick enough glaring at me with their poor, weak eyes, to match their poor, naked bodies. Deprived of everything. Knowing what their futures would hold. Fearing what had happened to their lost loved ones.

I knew as much as they knew, that they would eventually die, either of Typhus, starvation or, as they hoped, a quicker and easier death in the chambers. However my presence brought them to a new level of fear. The highest possible level. The knowingness of death. For in this replicate of hell, each and every one of them had lost any hope that their precious God was still out there. Driven insane by this realisation, all they wanted was to be the first on Death’s waiting list.

They thought that I had to come welcome them into the doorway of nothing. The ones that hadn’t yet been infected stood up, awaiting me to give them an order. “I am not here to give you permission for death, I am only here to watch your sorrow until you rot away in your rightful place.” That’s what I said to them, that’s when I was still convinced in what our world was going to come to, a ‘pure’ place, ridden of any ‘impure scum’.

I didn’t know if they could understand me through my gas mask, but yet, it didn’t matter, each of them still knew they were going to die and that I perhaps was just there to greet Death when he walked through the door. I decided to sit down – I walked over to the bed to my right and sat on the end of the bottom bunk next to a woman. This woman however didn’t seem ill or hungry; she greeted me with a smile and her ice blue eyes seeming to open up with joy. But her mood soon was forced to step back inside of her as she found the whole room staring at her with a new sense of subtle vex that glided across the room. The room remained silent for two more small seconds until coughing and small, weak conversation resumed.

“What is your name?” I asked the woman, who from what I could see seemed about 24, three years younger than me.

“Iris. Iris Coldflower.” She replied, splitting her blonde, now greasy hair down the middle of her head.

“Excuse me but that is not a Jewish name, nor a name very common in Deutschland.” I said, daring to remove my mask, as it seemed that if she was not ill then I may not become infected.

“No, it is not, I am not a Jew and both of my parents are from Britain and they moved to France in 1929.”

“May I ask why you are here then?” I questioned, taking of my mask fully to uncover my short brown hair and sweaty face.

“I kept Jews in my house, under the floorboards to be specific, but we were found, and so I am here today.” She said, seeming to become more optimistic as she reached the end of her sentence. I nodded; surprised I could understand her German despite her heavy French accent.

 “How do you know German so well, if you are from Britain?”

“Well my Father educated me, you see, he knew German a bit too well, and so only 3 years ago in 1940, he decided to educate me, but then he left and still to this day I do not know where he is, but I suspect that he’s alive and that he’s doing his part for the war.” She explained, getting evidently more nervous towards the end. “On your side…of course.”

“It’s okay; you don’t have to lie with me, anyway judging by your British heritage and as you lived behind ‘enemy’ lines and all and his seemingly extensive knowledge of German, it only seems right that he were to become a spy.”

“Oh no he is no spy!” she said, loud enough for the whole hut to turn around and create another silence again as they angrily dismissed Iris becoming friendly with me: the enemy. She began to speak again, whispering this time. “I mean, he might be for all I know, but you see, he wasn’t that type of man, if he were anything he would be on the front lines fighting you lot off, but yet again, I can’t imagine him doing that either.” She turned sad and looked down at the floor, it becoming more evident to me that she missed him. “Maybe he just ran away, went to Spain or Switzerland, where it’s safe, I wouldn’t be surprised, maybe he wanted me to be prepared for this new life so he taught me everything he could before he left, maybe that’s why he gave me this.” Iris stopped, a tear rolling down her left cheek.

She softly and slowly reached under her small pillow to show me a golden watch. With her soft, smooth skin, she placed it in my hands. The magnificent watch had roman numerals running around the outskirts while the tiny golden strands inside ticked away. “Turn it around.” She said, smiling, yet with more tears still falling out of her eyes. I turned it around in my left hand and placed it in my right. Imprinted delicately on the surface was one message. ‘May this watch give you hope and memory for the ones that you love, and may it give you and be a symbol of unity despite the differences and the distance.’

I smiled to myself as I suddenly felt all the emotion of Iris Coldflower and her life and how through her struggles that were in the past, present and to come, that she still had a tiny piece of hope that, even though would not save her life or reach for her loved ones, she knew that in this living memory, she had hope and good memories for the ones she loved. A tear sank down my right, damp cheek, and I smiled to Iris, this woman that I would have never thought to have ever met, liked, or loved.

And so each day I went to the same hut and sat on the same bed and fell in love with the same person more and more. But still, I wandered whether she loved me, or if she knew or could tell I loved her. Yet in this, I knew that I would not ever be able to be with her, not really, because she wasn’t meant to be loved, and especially not by me. I was married, happily married to the woman of my dreams, no one could match up to her personality or looks, and I had my kids, Jonas and Elisa, I couldn’t leave them and I do not know how I could ever leave my wife.

So as the visits continued, the days got colder and the more and more people began to die, I attempted to find any possible way that I could be with Iris, happily and safely. I didn’t know where I would take her, if we escaped, I couldn’t take her home – I wouldn’t head into my home with this woman that I just decided to escape out of a camp, just her, an attractive woman three years younger than me, my wife wouldn’t be that stupid. But I had to get her out, and I knew a way.

On my first full day at the camp, all my job was, was to survey a particular area, this area, luckily for me, was by a fence, and the fence, towards the bottom, had a hole around 20cm². I didn’t seem to question how it had got there, but it was a start and from that day and that sight, I knew that there was a way out of the camp.

It had been around three weeks since I first met Iris, in the camp no one had any idea of the date, or the day, or the time, except the guards of course, and Iris, with her watch. I walked into the hut as usual, attempting not to run because I didn’t want to look too suspicious, and I opened the door and as usual saw Iris sitting alone on her bed, waiting for me. But from the look on her face, things were not as they should be – her face, her beautiful face was a frown and the hut whole, even though this was usual turned their heads at me, but I could see that something was not right on their faces too. A guard, a guard like me, stood right in front of me, staring. With greasy short brown hair, like mine, and green eyes, unlike my deep blue ones, he began to open his disgustingly large mouth to speak.

“A word sir.” He paused, recognising that the entire hut was silent and eagerly awaiting and fearing what he had to say. “Outside.” He finished. I led the way as I opened the wooden door as I had only a few moments ago, pushing it only slightly more open so it was deliberately harder for my unfortunately fellow guard to open. “As you know it is Tuesday today sir.” His deep German voice being an ounce patronising.

“Yes I am familiar with the date.” I said smugly.

“Well as it is Tuesday, the train is coming and we are fairly short of huts so at 1 o’clock sharp your inmates are going to be taken um… to the showers – if you know what I mean – but of course before you take them just get some of the guards that were on night duty to do the regular spraying, the container isn’t that big you know.” This message sent a colossal wave of fear through me. I knew exactly what he wanted me to do. Murder. Pointless, unfair and outrageous murder.

“What! But surely we could just stuff the new people in with the others I mean with all the disease they’ll just die anyway. And besides it would be nice for the people to have some new people to communicate with won’t it?” I suggested, doing anything I could to save innocent lives, and the life I loved.

“I don’t know what you’re implying but they have to be killed, I mean if they are going to die anyway then we might as well make it quicker for them, and I don’t know what’s going on in your operation in that hut but I don’t really deem it wise that you make impure animals like them talk. For them to talk is just a spit on the Führer and our nation. Now get them to the chambers by 1 o’clock or maybe you’ll be paying a visit to the showers too.” He then stamped his left foot on the floor and raised his arm out straight so it was facing the sun. “Hail Hitler!” he announced. And so I was forced to do the same.

After the meeting the guard left and I walked back into the hut to see the people that only in a few hours, would be dead. I saw their faces watching mine life a hawk watching it’s prey and they saw the tears once again rolling down my face as the tsunami of fear and a fraction of envy that I could not be the ones in their position, and they – Iris – could be in mine. “1 o’clock.” I said to them. “You have four hours until they take you.” Iris ran up off of her bed and ran up to me and hugged me tightly.

Ever since my first visit, the number of people in the hut that liked me and knew I wasn’t like the rest of the guards grew. By then everyone in the hut liked me and I had realised that I was on the wrong side of the war. But I couldn’t change my sides not now. However, in the next few hours I was going to play a big part in subtle betrayal.

After 10 seconds of being embraced by Iris I somehow managed to force myself to push her away. I put my hands on her shoulders and looked her dead in the eyes. “I am going to get you out of here. I promise.” I smiled at her and then embraced her again for a few seconds. Once we had separated again I wanted to make my part in subtle betrayal bigger. I cleared my throat and opened my mouth. “Today, some of you will be able to get out of here, but not all of you. I know that what I am about to ask of you is a lot, but it has to be done in order for your safety and for your loved ones to be safe.” They all stared, even more worried than they were before. “I know a way out of here. But only a select number of you can leave. I say that for it to be unnoticeable, we get one person to escape every 30 minutes. So that’s 8 people, and no more.”

I don’t know how I brought myself to that. To betray my nation. To betray my friends and my family. But this had to be done. The prisoners struggled to form a list of who to save. The sickest and the eldest, despite how much it hurt them, agreed to stay behind, which left at least less than half of the hut eligible for freedom, around 20 people. And so they agreed on the children to be taken. 2 toddlers and 4 children, 1 of whom a teenager, for me to help aid escape. That left space for 2 more people. About 14 left by my estimation. 3 middle-aged women and 2 men agreed to stay behind because of their age, and a mother, who’s both children were slowly dying of Typhus, wanted to stay behind, so she could spend every last drop of life with her most beloved.

After stating that if I were to take toddlers I could get someone else to take them away whilst holding the toddlers. So 2 more teenagers, slightly ill, were nominated to escape. But that left the decision of whom else to take.

Eventually, they decided: A woman of 31 who had a child living in Berlin alongside her husband, and Iris for her kind and caring personality, her pure perfect personality. Iris volunteered to go last, as it was the most dangerous and risky time, and the woman agreed to go first so she could set a good example for the others.

Iris ran up to me again and gave me another long hug, as well as a kiss on the cheek for good luck. “5 minutes?” she asked, wanting to know exactly how long it would take me, and how long I would be away from her. She felt safe with me, she had told me so many times before, she told me that every time I left her, she always wanted me back, and now, I didn’t know what was going to happen. She might escape, I might be killed, I might escape, she might be killed, but for me, the only conclusion to this adventure I want to be is that we are both safe.

“5 minutes.” I replied, smiling at her, before I gave her a nod and opened the wooden door. Looking outside, I gave an all clear to the woman behind me and I led the way to begin her escape. We turned left as I became more cautious and worried about the consequences if things failed. We walked between two huts, when we reached the end the area of fence with the small hole in was in sight. I turned around the corner of the hut and ran to the end of it, waiting until the woman was back behind me. I looked around the corner again and saw a guard coming our way.

“Get back!” I whispered to her, scared for our souls. She ran back to the end of the hut and looked over to see if there were any other guards. There was.

“There’s another coming!” she said, panicking. I reached inside my inner pocket. A pistol then brandished from my hands. I loaded, and prepared. 5. I looked over the side closest to the hole again and saw the guard only a few metres away. 4. “My son…” she said, bringing herself to tears. 3. I raised my gun to the guard about to come in front of me. 2. I heard his footsteps getting closer in the mud. 1. His uniform appeared in front of me as the woman behind me quietly sobbed for her on coming death. 0.

The soldier walked onwards, not turning his head towards us. So the woman and I, crouched, moved around the corner of the hut as the guard from the other side appeared. Safe, we both took a deep breath in and I looked back round the corner to see the guard walking back down where he came from. I grabbed the woman’s hand and we both walked a few metres forward and turned right to see the guard walking in the same direction a dozen metres in front of us – towards the hole.

Slowly, we walked ever more closely to the guard and to freedom. The guard turned around the corner as another hut ended. I put the pistol back in my inner pocket and reached for my wire-cutters. As we got to the end of the hut I poked my head around the corner and saw the guard walking away, smoking a cigar. I ran to the fence and began cutting a bigger hole in it. After around two dozen seconds I had made a hole big enough for anyone to get through. “Go.” I ordered her.

“But I don’t know where to go.” She said, implying me to tell her where to go.

“Ah yes, there’s a forest around 500 metres away, get there and I’m afraid you’ll have to wait. That’s the real reason why I wanted you to go first, because a child would be far more foolish. Just go straight on and go a few trees deep into the wood. I’ll be there alongside Iris in 4 hours. Now go!” she ran. She ran as fast as she could and as fast as she ever would.

And so I did the same for 4 hours. I had taken 9 people and the only one left was Iris. I walked back into the hut to find Iris strangely at the other side of the hut. “I’m ready Iris.” I said, figuring out what she was doing over there. She was comforting everyone. They all knew their fate and sadly for them, they all knew hers. But this envy was the strangest yet saddest that could ever occur. Everyone envied Iris, while Iris and I envied them. We were the ones that wanted to be in there spot so they could be in ours, but for us, we had no choice in the matter, because in the end, it is our choices and free will that makes us, not our genes or our upbringing, and that’s why no one deserved to die, not truly.

I walked towards Iris and grabbed her hand. But as I began to walk away with her she stopped and put the watch, which was in her other hand, into my right hand. I stopped, put it up in front of my eyes and read the clock. 1 o’clock. The second hand turned to exactly 1, and then the bullets began.

A swarm of metal penetrated the end of the hut, killing at least 5 people. Then they started to come for us. We ran. We ran for our lives across the hut, bullets crashing through the wood. I did not know how many people died in there. But all I knew then was to run. I opened the door as the bullets stopped behind us. Iris and I got through the door and I reached for my pistol. I held it in my hand firm yet shaking and I fired at the five guards holding machine guns, all of them smiling with the achievement they had just made of killing several innocent lives. But to their brainwashed minds, they were doing right. They were purifying the human race and igniting the German Empire into a great fire that to my previous opinion would spread across the whole of the globe.

Two of the guards fell to the ground stone cold, while the three others held their injuries firm and attempted to come for us. “Run!” I warned Iris. We ran left and through the gap between the two huts. Warning whistles from the three remaining guards that were running after us were heard and I turned around and briefly fired a bullet, seeming to stop one of the whistles. We turned right and I sprinted forward leaving Iris a few metres behind me. As the two guards continuing the chase turned the corner I seemed to be only half a dozen metres before the hole.

A guard came running up to my right and I lined my pistol up and fired a fragment of metal straight through the guard’s head. I turned around looking at Iris. Her hair swaying from side to side as she ran. Her eyes arguing over hope and fear. Her mouth letting out screams. And her brain focused on one aim. Freedom.

“Come on!” I screamed at her, knowing that her life would always come before mine. She came within a dozen metres of the fence before I walked to the side and fired at the two soldiers coming after us, fearing what they might do to Iris if they caught her. They both fell to the ground dead. “What are you waiting for? Go!” I pleaded her, not knowing what was wrong with her.

She moved her head from side to side. She raised both of her hands from her stomach. She showed me. She showed my nightmares as well as the dead guard’s dreams. My love. My love. My love that I had to let go of. “We can mend it.” I suggested, knowing the answer before I said it.

“I’m sorry.” She said to me, tears crashing down her pale cheeks. The cheeks that I had seen bare no more tears than that. I reached my arms out and opened my hands to show her the watch and the gun.

“Take this for my memory, and take this for my protection.” I said, tears rolling out of my eyes.

“For your protection?”

“So I know that my love will never be hurt.” I admitted, finally letting myself pour out to her. She smiled. She walked forward and placed both of her delicate hands on my left hand.

“And take this for this watch will give you hope and memory for the ones that you love, and it will give you and be a symbol of unity despite the differences and the distance. And may it be a representative of our love despite the contrast of our lives and the similarity of ourselves.” She pushed the watch closer to my chest and I moved the gun closer to hers. We heard an array of heavy footsteps turning the corner to come for us as Iris’ pain became too much and she fell to the floor. “Go!” she ordered.

And so I did. I left the one I truly loved and went through the hole that would now separate us forever. Then I resumed where I left off, the contrast from then to now becoming worse to face every time my memory triggered it. I took one final look back at Iris Coldflower. The beautiful girl I knew manipulated into a symbol of her own name, a beautiful flower turning cold as she faced her final days. I saw the soldiers lift her up, and I fell to the ground in agony, my agony of fear and crushed hope of my love’s fate. My heart had been stolen and now she was taken further away from me as I knew I could never come to forget or ignore the situation of my life.

I met up with the other nine; the nine lives that I had saved, but to me, none of them could become close to the sacredness of Iris Coldflower. How insane was I? I was so envious when I had everything in the world. I had a family, but a family that I did not love. I wife was nothing but a friend to me. And my children were nothing but mere acquaintances that I would write letters to, to tell them of my adventures.

We dared to stay in the forest that night. With the food I had stolen I gave rations to the others, despite the small amounts, it was the biggest they had got in a while. I had also managed to stuff clothes belonging to other guards in two bags that I had given to two escapees. They slept for 9 hours, the 9 nine hours I had spent crying and mourning, looking at the one thing I now held most dear as a representation of what I truly did. At 6 o’clock the others arose from their sleeps and I began to lead the way as I had before, to their escape from any memory of that place.

 Eventually, we reached a road, with none of us knowing where we were I decided to take lead and walk left. The few cars that went past seemed to show no sign of seeing us – we would run and hide behind trees or bushes, fearing it were the enemy after us. As for the enemy, only one truck load full of soldiers had passed but I suppose they wanted me to feel isolated, not knowing what was happening or what had happened to my loved one. After a few days we reached a city: Hanover.

There I led my friends separate ways. The woman agreed to take 4 children with her back to Berlin on a train to live with, meanwhile for the other 4 children, two of whom toddlers, I sacrificed, I found an orphanage, and at this orphanage I left the children on it’s doorsteps, with no paperwork and no names to call them, the only remaining teenager huddled them all closely and nodded at me before I turned my back and left, she was only 13.

From then on I did not know what happened to the children, but unfortunately, they were not my problem anymore, I had to attempt to rebuild my life.

“And so somehow I ended up here.” I said to the old woman, the candles in the barn flickering as my story came to present. Tears drove down from the woman’s unseeing eyes.

“You can stay as long as you like.” She confirmed, getting up and smiling, yet still crying.

“Thank you so –“

“As long as you promise me one thing.” She said.

“Yes, yes, anything.”

“You find that girl, you find her dead or alive. Every person does not deserve to have to say goodbye like that, every person needs to hold that person in their arms one final time, knowing it was the final time. I made that mistake years ago.” She added, turning around and struggling to find the stairs.

“Oh please let me help you.” I said, now with tears falling down my eyes, walking over to her while leading her to the bannister.

“Now there’s no need for that, I’m only 67 you know.” The woman said to me, stepping up the next step. I followed her up the staircase until we reached the top and she showed me into her old daughter’s room who she told me had left several years ago. I sat on the bed and undressed myself, tired from the day’s events. And yet I now had another friend to mourn over and another few deaths to feel guilty about. Why do we in this battleground of Earth, regret something that can never be changed, despite the horrors and the losses, to truly get over something, you have to face the truth. A truth of silence and blindness.

I stayed in that woman’s house for 9 days. But soon I realised that I had to face what I had subtly dismissed. It was a bleak, cloudy day, around 12 degrees Celsius by my estimations. Light showers occasionally fell from the sky and I, miserable in my realisation, found myself walking along a road wheeling Hans’ body along in a wheelbarrow the woman had gave me. I spent 1 day and a few hours doing this.

But one day, when I was dozens of miles from Balleroy, I came across a man holding a machine gun. Strangely, I did not seem alarmed by this traumatic event; I simply stood and nodded at the man and continued to wheelbarrow Hans along a road that was coming towards a junction. “Any news on the front?” the man asked me in German. I stopped and turned at the man who I ran walked past moments before.

“No words have reached my ears my friend.” I replied, wanting to dismiss this man and get on with my journey back home. The man then seemed to grasp wind of how I was pulling a dead body through France.

“Is that your brother?” he asked me, yet he still seemed to not be shocked by this unique experience of his.

“No, a friend,” I said back, reminiscing Hans. “A dear friend.” I finished.

“I can get you back home.” The man said to me. I stopped slowly walking and turned fully around at the man.

“How?”

“I have many friends.” The man answered, implying that his friends had ways to get me into the Germany.

“And so did I.” I said, not wanting to continue my run of tears for 191 days.

“I’m sorry, my friend, but I can get you on a train and then get you into Germany, the train will go to Metz and then to Strasbourg, in Strasbourg we will drive you across a bridge and drive you to Stuttgart and from there you can get a train to wherever you desire.” The man explained.

“That would be an honour. But please sir, may I ask why you are doing this for a person who has committed such crimes that should not be named.”

“Because you are kind and true.” Truth, this word that continued to appear wherever I went to and wherever my mind took me. But what does it mean, to be true is not to lie and to not lie you are being honest and to be honest you must hurt someone along the line. And that’s who I am. Someone who has hurt so many people. At the camp I could have saved so many more lives, I could have saved all of them if I had the courage. And I could have saved her. I could have saved Hans and I could have saved the other soldier in the building. I could have made the children I sent away have good lives instead of abandoning them. I must add them to my list. The list of people I must save.

And now will I have to save this man, for it seems that whoever becomes rapped around my little finger never comes out to breathe again.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“A man with many regrets, yet a man that has no fear for the truth, and so a man with no fear for the end.” These wise words spoken from a wise mouth brought a sense of hope into my heart. All the people I had lost could somehow be found. This person was lost, but in his loneliness, he became a saint.

He told me he was in the Resistance. He had left his family. He could not face being sent away to a prison for the crimes against the Reich that he had made, so he sent himself away, on an adventure of self-exploration and for freedom. One day he returned home and his family were gone, his house had been stripped and blood was splattered all over the floor. But soon, he realised that the house he was in was burning, he ran out of it and watched as his previous life crumbled to ashes. Gone.

We got the trains to Strasbourg, and we drove across the bridge and into Stuttgart. Although, in Stuttgart my life took another dip. We drove to the Neues Schloss Palace. The building had been in tatters. But as I looked at it I remember my childhood, I visited Stuttgart once, my mother and I spent 2 hours where I stood, talking and admiring everything that surrounded us in those moments. And now, I looked around admiring the work of the Allies and their job of destroying one of Germany’s monuments.

The man and I had been driven to this place by one of the man’s friends – also part of the resistance. We walked to the back of the car and I opened to boot, the other two standing either side of me to cover what was inside, Hans. But as I made sure he was okay a sharp scream came from my right side. A woman, around 33 by my estimation looked at what was in the boot in horror. “Murderers! Murderers!” she screamed in German. Soon crowds of people began to surround the car until a soldier arrived.

I closed the boot and all three of us turned around in unison. “What is the problem madam?” the soldier asked.

“Look inside the car.” She said, pointing at the boot.

“Move away gentlemen.” The man ordered. The two men either side of me moved back while I stood still, waiting and wanting the worst. “I said move away young man.” He said, his nose touching mine. Suddenly I moved my right arm back and propelled it back forward, crunching into the soldier’s nose, breaking it from my angle. I shot my right leg up and kicked the man where he did not want to be kicked. He yelled out in pain and put both hands around his crotch.

But, out of nowhere, a bullet flew through the air and graciously sank into the soldier’s skull. The man fell to his right and landed before the woman who had called for his attention in the first place. All of the people screamed and most ducked down in terror that they might too be killed. However, our luck fell short. A group of soldiers in uniform began running our way.

All three of us ran back to get into the car. Half a dozen seconds later we were all in, but at the same time, maybe a bit earlier, a swarm of bullets came our way. We all ducked as we heard the back window smash as metal burst into the car. “Drive! Drive! Drive!” I shouted, hoping for my life.

Another eruption of bullets rocketed through the car and then I realised. “Come on!” I yelled, waiting but knowing what the response would be. I jumped into the driver’s seat on top of the man’s friend’s body and started the engine. It revved as I pressed my foot down on the accelerator. I drove on quickly, the crowds scattering as I left Stuttgart.

Since then, I was wanted, a fugitive in my own country. The car broke down shortly after and it took me a few days to get back to Berlin, yet again carrying Hans, this time in a bag. So long I walked, hiding from the enemy, my life in tatters and myself hoping that I can go back to my original life that would now be a refuge for the life I would be leaving behind.

As the days went by eventually I reached my final destination. Home. I smiled to myself hoping to end my trail of tears. I knocked on the oak door, my signature knock; every member of my household knew my knock: two knocks the same and then a final lighter one. A scream came from inside, a woman’s scream, my wife’s scream. I heard cries as I slowly backed away from the door and this door now being a metaphor of my new life becoming my old life as I entered it. I heard more screams. I heard footsteps. Heavy footsteps. Stamp. Stamp. Stamp. Stamp. Stamp.

A cough. I heard a gun being fiddled with. The door opened. Creaking. Each inch brought a new wave of intimidation towards me. Drowning me in the unknown. Part of a figure was the only thing I could see. And then, the gun. I could see no hand, just the machine gun pointing my way. My eyes fixating on the point where the bullet to end my sad life would come out. I breathed in, and ran.

He heard me. “Get him!” he yelled in German.

“No!” my wife yelled. I turned back not being able to see her face for one more time. But as I looked back, I saw in the window, my son, Jonas, with tears escaping his grey eyes, him signalling me to go to his right. So I did. I went in the direction he wanted me to and I ran, leaving the bag with Hans’ body in on the front garden grass. I leaped over the gate at the front of my house and sprinted to Jonas’ right, as it was now my right too.

A bullet came within half a dozen inches of my chest as it flew in front of me, and now I knew the chase was on. Unluckily, my house was near the Reserve Army Base, where I used to lead training sessions every day before I was asked to work at Westerbork, and I feared they too would turn against me. I took another right, daring to get closer to the Base but hoping to save my family. Another bullet flew through the air went straight through my right ear.

My hearing only partially muted for a moment or so, I continued to run, lucky that I wasn’t hit a few more inches to my left. The man chased me for another minute until I took another right and then another right a few minutes later, heading back toward my house. But, as I took a final look back I saw the vast numbers of German soldiers in their uniforms and with their guns after me; some in vehicles, driving at horrendous speeds to capture me. 100 metres, that’s all I had, that’s all I had to get to my family.

It was night and now the lights shining from the cars made my way back to unity clearer. . ‘May this watch give you hope and memory for the ones that you love, and may it give you and be a symbol of unity despite the differences and the distance.’ I repeated it in my head over and over. I had to get the distance, despite the present differences. I had to get to the ones I loved. But yet, I did not have any hope. I turned around and found a swarm of metal coming for me. If my head turned around, the next thing I would know was nothing. I held the watch up - I had been holding it in my hand for 2 days – and raised it an inch or so in front of my right eye. The bullet fell onto my foot and I crouched to let the other bullets rocket past. Only a small dent where the bullet had made contact with the back of the golden watch lay, but I knew I had to ignore this magnificent significance of the object as I got back up and ran.

The full moon glowed bright as I continued to run through the muddy, dark path leading to the back of my house from the forest. I looked back in horror hearing another round of bullets come towards me. But neither the shouts nor the bullets would stop me from getting the real people I loved and wouldn’t let go. I pulled back the bolt on the wooden door and pushed the door, closing it without wait behind me. Running, I still heard the shouts and bullets coming from behind, the German now meaning nothing to me, for this was the language of the people I now hate.

I heard two trucks coming my way and a vast array of bullets. The light in the kitchen was on as I saw my two children and my wife standing, watching me crying. The back door was open and I ran in. However, a huge crash came from where I had just come from and I looked back to see two trucks with an array of bullets in front of them heading for the rectangular window in which me and all of my family now were. A huge explosion came from upstairs and from the room next to us. Bricks flew from the side and bricks and other debris descended from the ceiling. The window smashed and my eyes closed to embrace my last moments of life.

The world around me became a blur as I opened my eyes. I could hear crackles of fire and the mutter of an engine. Burning, that’s all my senses could smell. I touched the floor, wet with blood; I moved my hands further and felt hard objects, debris. My eyes adjusted and I could not believe what this world was. I saw so much blood on the white tile floor but the only body there was mine. I saw bricks and debris strewn across the ground and once I looked behind, fire, behind and in front of two trucks that had concaved the wall in. Glass was also on the floor and as I felt around there was water too. What had happened here? Where was I? Whose blood was on the floor? How long had I been here? Why was I here?

A piece of burning wood fell on the front of the truck and I had to run to avoid what was about to happen. I was too late. The fire ignited the oil inside the car and together they exploded, causing the other truck to ignite and to fill the whole house with a fireball. The whole house was emblazed in flames, the house from my eyes was orange, my hair was blowing back as the force of the explosion soon flew me a few metres into the next room.

A few moments later it stopped, and the house was coated with orange flames. I got up; I felt my hand press against the edge of a sharp piece of glass. But, I felt no pain, as if my right hand had lost all senses, but it hadn’t because I could feel the glass. I ignored this and ran. I seemed to know where I was going despite swearing to myself that I did not know this place at all. I ran through two open rooms, a mirror smashed on the floor, and pictures with their frames.

As I ran, unknown to this place, I picked a picture and its frame up, only one shard of glass left in the top right corner of it. I removed it and for a moment stared at the picture. I knew these people, I knew that place. Two old people, one male and one female, sitting in two green armchairs, laughing, the woman’s head holding up in the air as she embraced the moment and the laughter, while the other man laughed, smiling and looking into the other woman’s eyes, the eyes that I seemed to remember as being green. He was leaned forward and both of his hands were on top of the woman’s right. A burning fire in a fireplace jumped at the centre of the back wall in the room and more pictures and more frames stood proud on top of it,

A piece of debris fell a metre to my right, smashing more glass and setting light to more things as it landed. I ran forward a few metres before turning right and then running through a gap in a wall where I predicted a door once was. I tripped. A fragment of something hard lay on the ground and my legs fell over one another. I heard cracks behind me. More things fell. A huge rumble came from higher above me. A sharp piece of glass stabbed as it fell from upstairs into the back of my left leg. Yet, I could not feel anything again.

A piece of burning wood fell a few seconds after the glass did, smashing the glass and setting light to my clothes. I reached back as I heard another huge rumble, trying to push the burning wood off my legs. My fingertips reached the very end of the wood. Another rumble came behind and I heard what seemed to sound like the top floor collapsing onto its knees. My fingers crawled along the top of the wood. Another crash. Another explosion. My fingers managed to push the wood off my legs and, with pain absent from my body, I got up with my trousers burning and I walked away with the house crumbling to the ground – fires erupting into flames that went firing up into the air.

Everything that I was wearing was burnt and my mind seemed to tell me to pick up a bag near a fence at the end of a garden. It was heavy and I could not think what was in it. But still I opened a fence and my body turned left and turned into a run. Alongside the bag, I still held the picture, and I looked at it: my parents – that’s who they were. And so I knew now where to go. However, as I looked at this picture and the people in it and how it had been in this burning house, I realised what this house was, my house, my home, my life.

My mind sparked and I knew, as well as I knew I had to go to my parents, I had to find my wife, she couldn’t have been in the house - my mind seemed to forbid me from going to the previous moments before I blacked out. I seemed to want to go to a place western from where I was, but before I could turn west, I turned right, sent deeper into the city in which I found myself in.

Men in uniforms with symbols on, their hats with skulls on and their hands with guns in seemed to be the main focus point of the city – people walked hurriedly, heads up and trying to avoid eye contact with these people. As I got deeper into this strange city, I saw a group of soldiers take a man with what seemed to be a son out of their home, which was next to a pile of rubble from what I estimated used to be some sort of shop or home. The man cried while his son stood, seeming to be proud, stood next to a guard, later on giving him a hug.

Then my brain seemed to let me through another gate that I could not believe I did not previously try to remember – my son, Jonas. An short cycle of him replayed in my mind, the tape was of him in a window in front of a hand-made white curtain, with tears escaping his eyes and his slightly signalling to someone he was looking at, with his right hand, for them to turn to his right, yet a slight smile seemed to eventually plague his face, the tears continuing, and the signal, but the smile was all you could see and notice. Why did, as I saw this boy on the street, open a gate into my memory of my son. If it was a memory then perhaps the gate was a cemetery gate and my mind ordered the confusion to be banished from this place in my mind, and to show me my son’s fate.

My wife would know, and that gave me more reason to find her. So my body and mind continued to act as a puppeteer for my soul, and it took me deeper into this city of symbols, violence and tragedy – from my eyes, or maybe, my possessed eyes. I began to notice more rubble, and building collapsed, and fires, and people walking fast seeming to wanting to be escaping the men walking in uniforms with their strange symbols and their frightening guns. Was this all meant for me? Were the uniformed, armed men symbolising their search for me? Were the desperate, escaping people me? What was I escaping from? And if so, why was my possessed self taking me deeper into this strange city? Why was my mind opening gates yet keeping so many closed?

I wanted to remember everything, this life I had left before me was infinite, who was I? Who was I in this place? I had a son, and a wife. Perhaps they were the people I was seeing, they wanted to escape me. I was the soldiers. And this marvellous vision of my son staring at something, smiling and crying and signalling and seeming to be waiting for something, what? Was I this man that he seemed to be trying to deceive? Yes. My mind was punishing me. It was my fault that he was buried. Mine! I had killed my own son. From this horrid vision I now saw, made sense of, and detested, I realised, my son hated me, this signal, led me to where I was.

All this time, I had been going right. Where would this place lead me to? My death. He wanted me to die. For this cemetery in my mind was not my son’s but mine. And it was beginning. My senses were diminishing. And at that moment, I realised, again, nobody had noticed me. My clothes had all burnt away. I had walked for miles and nobody had taken any look at me. Surely one of the men in guns would have. But no, they had not.

So I stopped, and screamed. “Hello?” I yelled, the words seeming to come out in a language that my mind was not familiar to, or even think in. So another door opened and I learnt a whole set of knowledge, Hallo, Bonjour, Salut, Ciao, Guten Tag. This magnificent array of words, and more, this, this was a true wonder, communication, a rope that everybody could tie their own knot in and pull and tear and make into different unique knots, yet some of the knots were the same and more tears of rope were different lengths by some were on average the same, some ropes could be linked but others could never be linked, and this link, was a consequence of communication, because it seemed in my stuttered mind, that people pulled too hard, and if you pull too hard, you can hurt not just yourself, not just your loved ones, not just everyone that has ever been known, but anyone.

For this was my fault. I had pulled too much from other people in this invented world of mine; however my ropes that attached me to the hierarchy were beginning to snap, and this soft, fabricated world, would dissolve and die, and would leave me to fall as the final ropes turned into strings, and the strings turned into hairs and the hairs turned to threads and the threads, turned to nothingness, so I would be yet again banished from above, and I would fall into the array of a fogged, infinite, labyrinth, that would be my cell until eternity ended.

And I felt my eternity of life beginning to fade. No reply gave hope. No ropes were given back to me. Did I have them all? Was there to be just silence in this place that I can only describe as an unstable staircase leading into the opaque maze that the end would be? Has everyone been to this place? Was everyone in this place trapped in silence as well as me? Were the soldiers the Gods? My son. My son? He was one of them. He was a God, leading me downward, he was a messenger that told the higher Gods who to put on what staircase, so he didn’t tell me where to go, he led me, and he is the one who possesses me. But, a staircase, if you are on a staircase, you can go two ways, and from that point where I had awoke, I had been going down. I needed to go back. I needed to go back in order to save my sorry little life; I needed to go back to reality.

I turned back, knowing no one would notice me, and as I got farther away from the city with many levels, I went back to where I had been – I saw the man and his son, again, the man cried and pleaded to the men with symbols, was this me and my son? My son was the messenger; he told these men with guns about me, about the wrongs that my mind forbids me to see, they were the ones that took me away to this world, this was a replay of my life, the most important moment of my life, so I could not go back there, because as I looked at this cycle, I noticed again the huge pile of rubble next to the house in which the man or I had been taken from, that was my house, my house in the future of what I was watching, I was in the present, and the man being taken away, was a symbolisation of my son, signalling me to come to this world where I would wait for the labyrinth.

The symbol. My mind let me open another gate because I had found the key. I knew this symbol, another wave of knowledge swept across my mind. The symbol, the war, the people, the soldiers, the higher people, they were the Gods now, and my son had be turned by them, so he was given responsibility as a lower God, he was or is going to be responsible for my fate. I knew now that I was not in a fabricated world, because in war, someone has to pull too many ropes and there would not be one person that has at least one tiny speck inside of them, that the war ended, and for there just to be good in the world, and if anyone wanted that, truly, they would not go down to this labyrinth.

I knew then. I knew what I was. Nobody noticed me. I could not feel pain. And I was not about to die. I was already dead, a ghost - a shadow of my previous life and self. And nobody can see their shadows unless the sun is behind them, and so if they can see what is in front of them, they still have more live to live, and more to see, while I, in this pitiful ‘life’ of mine, I cannot see myself, because my life is behind me and so I am the shadow, wanting to watch my life, but I cannot.

Life runs wild around me, and I am surrounded by it, it is a punishment, this is the ultimate punishment, people life and cry with each other while you are isolated in a cage while you watch them living, if anything, this is hell, this is the life that the Gods have chosen for me, this is the life that can happen to anyone, and it’s not fair. This is my son’s doing, he is the one that has been taking me here, he did!

Why can’t I remember anything? I can only have visions and gates, gates that only lead to knowledge or visions, and so I only have gates, and if I can open all of the gates I need all of the keys, and to get to all of the keys you have to search for them, and you search for them you have to spend more time watching life around you laugh and cry and move while you are stuck in the labyrinth of the world that has turned into your own huge hell overnight. I am not going to search for the keys. Whatever wrongs I can’t remember, I will remember and so I will let the Gods have what they want, they can have it their way and I will stay and watch life until it ends and so the eternity will end and everyone will be stuck and stuffed into a cave that will close on everyone until, the fantastic finale that everyone thinks about, that brings out all the answers, all the answers that really count, that determine everything, that extend, or end reality.

I woke up, I was on the floor at the spot where I had realised that I was on the staircase, but now, I knew, I had to suffer by watching life. I continued going in the direction my son took me to until, a big truck with soldiers going into it appeared in front of me. My possessed body took me inside it and I walked to the centre of the truck and sat on the left side, defying my son. Soldiers began to sit in front of me and to my sides, until, almost by destiny, the last soldier to go on, sat in my place. I cannot describe the experience, of someone sitting into your body, it feels quite sickly at first, but after a while, you get used to it.

Once I had got used to it I closed my eyes and listened to everyone around me talking for hours on end and eventually the truck stopped and I jumped up with my eyes still closed, and ran straight ahead. That experience though, was far worse than being sat into; I guess ghosts cannot walk through walls. Yet, luckily, I could not feel the pain, so, as a normal human would, I walked out of the truck and the setting ahead of me set off a chain reaction of gates in my mind. This was my old home. It was a barn. And I had another realisation; I still had the bag and the picture in my hands.

I looked at the picture and saw my parents and the room they were in, that room was in that house I was staring at. The soldiers, my son, my parents, the Gods, me. I ran alongside 20 other soldiers who ran been ordered to storm the house. A man kicked the front door down and I ran in behind him, turning right, straight into the room in which the photo was taken and where my parents always were. But instead, only one green armchair was filled, my mother, with a pistol to her head, tears falling out of her eyes and cries coming out of her mouth. Her fate to her seemed inevitable.

“In here!” a soldier shouted from behind me.

“No! No! That’s my mum! You can’t do that!” I screamed and shrieked at the oncoming wave of soldiers entering the room and surrounding my mother. But my screams could not do anything. I watched. A countdown came out of one of the soldier’s mouths and at the same point I watched as a bullet from every gun from every soldier appeared, and my mother, sat with a gun already in her hand, yelled and yelled until she too joined the soldiers, she fired as every single bullet entered her, and then, she faded.

She was gone from my vision. I watched as she disappeared from life and from my version of life. My knees dropped from the wooden floor and as the soldiers walked out, smiling smugly, the last one dropped a lit match on the floor. It landed on a rug and I watched as the flames turned into fires. My mother was gone. But where was my father. Suddenly I heard a scream come from upstairs. I ran up the staircase and went into the room the screaming was coming from, the flames tailing behind me.

Jonas. His head was poking out from under his bed and he crawled out, tears rolling down his eyes. He wasn’t a God. He was innocent. He did not want to kill me. He did not hate me. He was leading me to go to on that truck to come to this place and either save him, or save his grandmother and my mother. But I had failed. All that I had done was arrive and then watch, because I somehow, was stupid enough to get killed, somehow in my own house so I could not save anyone’s life, and I never will be able to now.

He got up and looked down the staircase; he coughed as the smoke went into his lungs, and he saw the fire beginning to lick its way up the staircase. He ran back into his room. He went to the window and looked at the soldiers in the truck and the driver starting the engine. He opened the window and looked down and shivered. I stood beside him and looked down. He stood on the window sill. “Jonas no!” I shouted and yelled and screamed.

“I’m sorry father.” He said, with tears coming out from his eyes. And as a tear escaped his cheek and fell down onto the ground, he followed it, and fell down in the air for a few seconds until his body seemed to partially explode before, yet again, he vanished from my vision and all I could see of my son as a memory was his blood. I threw the bag out of the window and held the picture as I jumped out of the window, landing in my son’s blood. I looked back and saw the right side of the house begin to collapse as the fire reached the foundations and broke the walls. I picked the bag up, and did all I could, watch, as yet another fraction of my life and living memory of it was lost.

I sat down and cried, the fires and the growing numbers of rubble not affecting me because I knew now that they could never hurt me, that, as well as not being able to be a part of real life, that piece of real life could not affect me because I was not real life, I was a shadow, and the only thing that can stop a shadow is a cloud, and right now, this was my cloud, but I was not truly dying, so I knew then, I would have to watch the world forever because there was no cloud for a shadow, and there is no cloud for a shadow.

I don’t know how many days I stayed there for, crying and contemplating the things my future would bring my eyes to see, but one day, on a grey cloudy day, I remembered and realised, what was in the bag? It was slightly opened when I looked at it properly, and I could see mud on clothes. I opened it. I saw a body, a bloody and muddy body, put into the position where his arms were holding his legs into his body. I took the body out of the bag and realised who it was. Hans. My best friend. The invasion, the Americans, the British, the Germans, The Reich, the Nazis, the guards, the relocation camps, Westerbork, Bergen-Belsen, Iris.

My love, Iris. Where was she? I remembered. I remembered the day I escaped. We were so close, but she was so far. I remembered as I entered the forest I looked back and saw her being carried away by the ones she and everyone else on this sad Earth hated. Then I also remembered. Shortly before I got here I heard one of the soldiers mention Celle. Celle, it was southern from Bergen. And Bergen was the centre point to Bergen-Belsen.

This was destiny, this why Jonas possessed me to get on that truck and to get here and then to get to Iris. He knew as much as I did, that this place was where I was truly meant to be. But then, as I adjusted Hans’ body so I could sling it over my shoulder and carry him as well as myself to Bergen, I noticed inside the bag, the watch. I picked it up and noticed that only a small dent lay on the back of the golden watch that read ‘May this watch give you hope and memory for the ones that you love, and may it give you and be a symbol of unity despite the differences and the distance.’

I picked the picture up and put it at the front of the huge pile of rubble. For this was still my parent’s house. I ran back to the body and to the watch and slung the body over my right shoulder while holding the watch in my left hand, the hand in which Iris had pushed closer to my chest moments before we were separated. Then, I ran. I ran towards the forest and continued for hour after hours until I reached the place where I had taken my final glance at Iris.

I ran forward, but, as I continued to run, I noticed something, soldiers, but these soldiers weren’t the ones I hated, they were the ones that truly wanted good in this world. I ran forward to the hole where I had escaped and Iris had failed to, and I had abandoned her. It seemed strange how, despite the numerous escapees, the soldiers did not close the hole, and so luckily for me I was able to get in, not like anyone would have noticed me any other way.

I spent a few minutes looking around the grounds of Bergen-Belsen but I stopped and stared in shock as I saw a huge bulldozer driven by a British soldier push hundreds of bodies into a mass burial grave where already, thousands if not hundreds if my eyes deceived me, or if Jonas deceived me. I had to find Iris, my true love. I had to find her. I looked around at all of the huts for hours but eventually, did not find her. So I walked into the other buildings where British soldiers were going through the German’s things that they had left for them to find at this terrible place.

They looked through the left over clothes and jewellery taken from the prisoners, and they looked through the thousands of pieces of paperwork in hope of finding any evidence that would stand worthy against the people’s true enemy. Then, as I watched these soldiers go through the old prisoner’s things, I realised, I had not checked one more place – the chambers.

I ran and ran as fast as I could and I opened the wooden door and then ran across the place where the piles of people would get undressed to go into the next room into their unknown labyrinth. I walked into the room, looking at the heavy metal door in which people would eventually find themselves screaming at in any hope to search for the final light that would be their ever growing short lives. I looked up and saw in the corner Iris, my love, weeping as she covered her naked body up with her arms protecting her legs.

I screamed her name a thousand times and went down on my knees begging to the God that didn’t exist to let me into the world of life once more. As I looked at her again, I noticed everything I had once noticed before about her, but all of these had changed. Her hair was no more and it had been completely shaved, only tiny blonde hairs poked out of her scalp. Her ice blue eyes had turned even colder as more drops crawled down her face. And then I noticed the one thing that gave me so much pain even though it was not my pain to bare – the wound, the place in which the bullet had entered her and had shattered all of my dreams of her living to this day.

I crawled towards her so our lips were only inches away and as I listened I could hear her weak heartbeat. “Don’t cry.” I said to her. “Don’t cry.” I repeated. I comforted her in my mind for around half an hour until I heard her let out a final scream. She grasped her stomach in agony. She wept and yelled and cried and after a few more screams she shouted my name so it echoed across the room and came back into my ears several times. I yelled and yelled at the Gods to save her soul and let mine return to the true world. She let out a few more sobs and screams until her final clasp onto life became too much. She stood up and then I saw it, I saw her body fall to the hard ground and I watched as I saw her body fade away.

All that was left was the pistol. I touched it and held it close to my chest, attempting to repeat her delicate hands coming closer to my chest with the symbol of our love. That’s it! ‘May this watch give you hope and memory for the ones that you love, and may it give you and be a symbol of unity despite the differences and the distance.’ I ran outside the building and stood in the centre of a field. The bulldozer now had no occupants and I wandered why I could see all of these dead people but not the ones I loved, not one of them. This was another punishment of mine.

Jonas, my mother, the man and his friend in Stuttgart, Hans, Iris, all these people had died because of me. My wife, she was most likely to be killed. My wife, me, Jonas, Eliza. My daughter. How could I forget my daughter, he second most beautiful girl alive? The memories that this new gate had let me see were some of the best memories I ever had.

I turned to my left as I heard some shouting. Three soldiers pushed an old man out of the building with all the paperwork. The old man wore a uniform with the symbols on, and then, two of the three men stood on either side of him and then got two pistols out from their pockets. They held the loaded weapon to each side of the man’s head and after a countdown from the third man they both fired and the man in the uniform fell to the muddy ground and after a few seconds, strangely, he faded as well into the misty labyrinth.

Then I realised. This was not just some old poor man in an enemy’s uniform, he was my father. I had not seen or spoken to my parents for 3 years. I missed them then as much as I do now.

The soldiers that had killed the man then lit a match and set alight to the building. It erupted into orange flames and after hours of watching, the whole place around me was burning and nothing but fire surrounded me and eventually haunted me because it was at that exact moment when there was nothing in my view but fire that I remembered. The final gate opened. My death. The guard, my wife, my son, the forest, the moon, the army and guns, the vehicles, the watch, the kitchen, the explosion, the bricks, my family, everything and everyone.

This was how I died.

And then I remembered, within the gate that had opened, there was another cemetery, but in that cemetery only two graves and two gravestones, Eliza, and my wife. I remembered. A brick from the explosion in the next room propelled into Eliza’s skull just as both vehicles smashed into the kitchen and threw her across the room to her death. Two bricks rocketed into my wife’s stomach and chest and a piece of debris from the falling floor upstairs fell onto her and she fell to the ground and a thousand shards of glass crashed into her already broken body then to finish it all off, as she was on the floor, in excruciating pain, so close to death, one of the vehicles drove over her body, erasing her from me, and from life.

But within that cemetery that I found myself in, I saw more graves and gravestones being added, the 100 and whatever people I had killed, Hans, Jonas, Eliza, my wife, my mother, my father, the man and his friend, Hans’ friend, Iris. Finally Iris. I travelled so long in my fabricated mind to find Iris’ grave and gravestone, but then, as I looked closer through my mind in that cemetery, I noticed, by her grave was the golden watch, perfect in every way it always had been.

I dropped Hans’ body and held the watch in both hands. ‘May this watch give you hope and memory for the ones that you love, and may it give you and be a symbol of unity despite the differences and the distance.’ ‘May this watch give you hope and memory for the ones that you love, and may it give you and be a symbol of unity despite the differences and the distance.’

I kept on repeating it to myself out loud, looking and trying to explain to myself every word and what it meant. Hope. I had no hope left in me. Memory. That was all I had, nothing to see and nothing to cherish apart from in my fabricated mind. Love. Gone. Unity. This was the one that tricked me. ‘A symbol of unity despite the differences and the distance.’ Iris was dead. I was dead. But I was being punished. What had Iris done wrong? She was the nicest most perfect and pure person you could ever meet; she would never be punished for anything.

And so I am standing here right now on this very spot with the fires burning around me and Hans’ body on the floor and the watch with so many levels in my hand. So after the amount of times I had read this watch, I finally now understood. I am turning it over and I am seeing the golden pieces tick. I am punching the front of it. The glass is falling on the floor and I am using my dirty, horrid long nails to dig into the centre, the heart, the core of the watch. I am seeing it now. The one object that unity is and that will finally make me at peace with myself and with the Gods. This will finally give me unity with Iris.

I am touching it;