

## **Soldier in the Mist**

When I was a boy, I didn't think my world was different than any other child's elsewhere. I thought my world was the shared experience. That everyone knew and felt what I did. Knew and felt the love of parents, the sadness of watching friends die, and the terror of watching the mist roll in from the forest.

It wasn't until a day in the summer of my 10th year alive that I discovered my place in the world was very different than the rest. That was the day I saw him. He stood in the middle of his squad, surrounded by men in uniforms just like his; men who wore the same clothing and the same tired, worn-down look on their faces. But it was him; I knew even then that Master Sergeant Patterson was different than all those who looked so similar; different from anyone I'd ever met. It was through him that I saw my world view change at the same time as my fear of the mist grew to proportions even I wasn't prepared for; even with all that the mist had taken from me.

To tell this story properly, we need to go back not long ago to where I grew up. We lived in a remote area east of the city of Bihać, on the northern end of Bosnia & Herzegovina. Well, that was the name after the tear down of Yugoslavia, which had been the home I knew. We were told by father that the government created this new country but that we, as Catholic Croats, would not be welcome in most places. He said it was best we stayed in the village, regardless of what happened there or outside of it.

Our village was remote, but not primitive. Of the twenty some homes, there was a baker, butcher, mechanic, and constable. We had access to news through the radios in several homes, and once a week a few of the men would drive in one of the few trucks we owned to the larger areas west to trade and gather supplies. I often wondered why we didn't go with them, permanently.

Once, when I asked Father of this, he said we were in charge of this village and that we weren't ever to leave. It wasn't until I was older that I learned the real reason we couldn't leave, nor tell anyone of why. We were locked to this village, in our souls. If we

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moved away, there would be no barrier between the Sleeping and the rest of the world. Apparently, long ago, when someone realized the necessity of such a barrier, we were elected to that duty. It didn't matter that we were dying and soon to be forgotten. Our job was to keep them in the forest. We did that with our lives. We didn't tell anyone about them because no one would believe us. We were consigned to this, and this was our world.

While I was a child, and not fully understanding the implications, news spread of a great conflict between the internal groups of people in our country. We knew of the atrocities, as well. The genocide and the murder of innocents. It was a lot for my young mind to take in, but it was still the world I knew.

On this summer day in June of 1993, I was playing with a neighbor in an area behind our home, some forty or so feet from the edge of the forest. Unfortunately, we couldn't play in the front of our house since it abutted the road directly in front. We knew the distance to the forest edge because we had known our entire lives where the line was that marked the safe distance. A distance that could allow us ample time to see the mist and make it home to the cellar under the house where we would wait out their arrival and departure.

Every home in the village had a cellar.

We heard them before we saw them, the soldiers that is. We saw them come from an area south of our home, skirting the tree line of the forest. They wore the bright blue helmets we had seen on a few soldiers who drove through the town earlier so we knew they were foreign to our country and weren't the ones who meant us harm. Yet, we still watched them warily from our vantage point. Our interactions with different soldiers in this area, few that they were, were rarely positive.

When they moved closer we could see that there were only eight of them, all wearing blue helmets, and all of them armed with a rifle slung over their shoulder. They saw

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us in the distance and stopped chatting to each other. The one in the front, who we later found out was Master Sergeant Patterson, turned his head and said something to a soldier behind him. That soldier pulled his rifle towards him and scurried into the trees, followed by two others. I wondered if they forgot why they were walking along the edge of the forest. They should already know not to go in there.

We immediately stood from where we had squat playing with our toys. The remainder of the group saw us and slowed their walk, also bringing their rifles into their hands. None pointed towards us, but even at a young age we could tell when someone was nervous. They all seemed nervous. Looking back on it, they were probably nervous because of our reaction to seeing someone willfully run into the forest. No one does that. No one runs into the forest.

When the group was fewer than fifty feet away, they stopped and the one in front raised his arm high and said something to us in a foreign language.

He must have seen the confusion on our two faces because he chuckled, then turned to one of the men behind him who then spoke in Croatian, "Hello, we are in need of some assistance. Would you be able to point us to someone who could help?"

The front soldier's smile faltered as he saw our attention shift back-and-forth from him to the trees in the direction the other soldiers went. He turned his head in the same direction and again said something we couldn't understand but a few moments later the same soldiers walked out of the trees and rejoined their fellows. They spoke in hushed tones and shrugged their shoulders as one of them swept his hand in the direction of the forest. Sergeant Patterson, who was still unknown to us at the time, stepped forward a couple of paces and smiled again. This time cocking his head to the side towards the forest and raising his eyebrows, as if to ask, 'was that what you were worried about?'

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My friend and I looked to each other and then back at this strange appearance of foreign men, not saying anything.

The one who spoke Croatian took a couple of steps forward, spoke to the sergeant, and then said to us, "Were you worried these men were going to hurt you? They were simply checking to make sure they weren't going to be hurt by anyone here. It is safe now."

My friend made a hard swallow and looked at me with the same expression I was feeling. They didn't know about the forest. I decided I would speak up and let them know what we knew.

"No," I said. "We weren't worried about your soldiers hurting us. We were worried you would aggravate them."

The soldier who spoke got a puzzled look and relayed our information back to the sergeant, who also had a puzzled look. More words were spoken between them and they seemed to ignore us for a few minutes.

My friend saw this as his opportunity to make a break for it, so he turned and ran towards his home nearby. The soldiers saw him run and immediately tensed up, bring their rifles into their shoulders, the barrels pointing down while they crouched a little lower.

"Why did he run?"

Not knowing how to respond, other than the truth, I said, "He has always been afraid of the forest. Now, he thinks he might be afraid of you, so he has run home. I'm certain he is bringing someone from my village here shortly, and you can meet them."

The soldiers moved closer, and I stood my ground. There was every reason to be nervous and worried, especially when you see men with guns wearing a uniform. But, for some reason, my desire to flee was cancelled out by the kindness I could see on the

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sergeant's face. He didn't look like he was willing to harm anyone. He reminded me of Pietre, who we hadn't seen for a long time.

Pietre was a neighbor's son from our village. He was always kind and gracious to everyone. He would go out of his way to help anyone with their chores and duties. One time, he helped father with the wood chopping for nearly an entire day. There were cords and cords of wood stacked behind the house. At the end of that day, Pietre simply shook my father's hand and thanked him for the opportunity to help.

His father and mother were devastated when he said he was leaving the village to join the army. I remember him trying to calm his hysterical mother and angry father the day he got in the truck to leave. He stood tall, with no hint of anger or resentment on his face. I'd not known at the time what that meant, but now I know it was the face of someone who patiently attempted to show others the dedication they felt to a just cause. That was the last time any of us saw or heard from Pietre. His parent's died the previous spring.

I saw hints of Pietre on Sergeant Patterson's face.

When they got close enough to sit on a couple of logs my father had set up to cut later into lumber, they seemed to relax. Their banter with each other picked up, even though I couldn't understand what was being said. I watched them sit and lower their defenses enough for me to take a good look at them.

The logs they sat on, with an air of acceptance that they were seats just waiting for them, gave me a pang of hurt. They didn't know (because how could they) that they sat on the unfinished work of my father. He was going to cut them that day. If he had finished, there would be no seats for these soldiers. If he had finished, he would probably be greeting these men instead of me.

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They wore green uniforms with other green colors and shapes randomly printed around it. I believe my father called it camouflage, but I had never really seen an example. It was easy to see that if not for the bright blue helmet they wore, they would be difficult to see in the forest. All around their uniforms were these little pockets, seemingly bursting at the seams with hidden items. They also had lettering on the front of their uniforms which I assumed was their names. They were odd names, too, like Patterson, Ruiz, McConnley, and Long. The one who spoke Croatian, his uniform said Iskra on the front, which I understood since that was a name of old neighbor who moved away a couple of years ago. All of them had a small rectangle on their sleeve which looked like a flag. If it was, it was one I'd never seen before. It was a white rectangle with what looked like a red leaf from a hrast tree. I don't know what it meant, but since they all had it I assumed it had something to do with where they came from.

Sergeant Patterson looked at me while I examined their uniforms and said something to Iskra, who then asked me, "Have you ever seen a soldier before?"

I nodded, remembering the first time I saw a soldier. He came through with four others in that tank. We thought the world was going to shake apart with how loud and heavy that thing was as it rolled through the middle of our village. They were not nice soldiers. Their time here was painful and loud.

"What is your name?"

I knew Iskra asked this, but I looked directly at the sergeant and answered, "Patrik."

He returned my stare and started laughing. He said something again to Iskra who then said, "That is funny since his name," pointing to the Sergeant, "is also Patrick."

The other soldiers now seemed resigned to sit and speak with each other. The sergeant and Iskra walked a little closer to me. Not close enough to crowd me or make me nervous. No, it seemed like the sergeant knew enough to stay a few feet away. As if he had children or worked closely with them before.

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His language sounded so bizarre to me. The words were strung together in a lilt and cadence that sounded more like a song than a dialect. I was almost annoyed when he would stop and Iskra would speak. I knew what Croatian sounded like but the sergeant's words sounded so much better. It was helpful that Iskra was there, obviously, but it still annoyed me.

The three of us stood there chatting about my village and our home. He asked about my school, which I explained ended three years ago and we didn't know if it would start again. The adults in our village were reluctant to start teaching again after the last teacher was taken. He asked about what we liked to do for fun and what my favorite foods were. It was such an unusual and strange conversation. One unlike any I'd ever had with an adult before so I was captivated. In our village, adults and children rarely have conversations, except to rebuke or admonish us for breaking the rule of entering the forest or making too much noise. So captivated, in fact, that I didn't even hear my friend return with his father and our neighbor, Mr. Zadravec.

After introductions were made, which I knew because I heard the sergeant say his name as he extended his hand to shake the hands of our two men, they spoke through Iskra about what they were doing there. They said their vehicles were involved in a small mud slide about six miles from here and this was the first home they'd come across since trying to find assistance.

My neighbors listened politely to the soldiers, but they also continued to dart their eyes to the forest beyond every few minutes. After their latest glance, the sergeant turned and looked in the direction they kept glancing, turned back and asked through Iskra, "What is it you keep looking for? The boys here were also nervous about the forest."

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My friend's father stood up a little taller, nerves appeared to be heightened, and said, "Forgive us, please. We are concerned that all of this activity has aroused the Sleeping and that they will come early."

Our neighbor sucked in air quickly through his teeth at the mention of the name and said in hushed tones to him, "We don't need to say their name or tell these men about them. Let's just get them out of here and get home before any trouble starts."

Iskra relayed what was said, even though at my young age I knew that the way Mr. Zadavec spoke meant it was supposed to be kept secret. Iskra shouldn't have said anything.

Sergeant Patterson furrowed his brow and appeared puzzled at what Iskra was telling him. Looking from him to the two men and back he asked a question then stared hard at them while waiting for the translation and an answer.

"The Sergeant would like to know if you mean other soldiers are nearby and that you fear for your safety. He said he is willing to call for help if-"

"NO!" the two men from my village shouted almost as one. The other soldiers looked up from their own conversations to see the tension rising. They all stopped speaking and kept their hands on their rifles.

Sergeant Patterson asked a quick and curt question, his eyes not leaving the men, stuck in a strong stare. Iskra relayed, "Are you in trouble here?"

The father of my friend said, "Enough," and grabbed my friend by the shoulders and lead him away from all of us. Mr. Zadavec watched him go and you could see the indecision on his face as to follow him or stay and continue to warn these foreigners of the trouble they were causing. He opted for the former. Turning quickly he strode after the other two.

The Sergeant and Iskra took a couple of steps forward asking them to wait in both languages, but with no effect. They looked at each other for a moment then both turned

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to me. The sergeant asking me directly, Iskra relaying right after, "What was that about? Are there soldiers here who you are afraid of? We can protect you."

On the last question I nearly laughed. Protect us? From the Sleeping? No one had ever been able to protect us from them, and more than these eight men have tried, no matter how many guns they had.

I told them, "No, there are no soldiers here. Only the Sleeping. You really need to go. There's no way they haven't figured out you are here."

"Who are the Sleeping? Is it another town or gang?"

Again with the silly questions. I had never met anyone who did not know who the single greatest threat to us were. How do you explain who they are? You just know. We all know. We've seen it over and over for as long as history has been written in this area. I'm not certain anyone in our village knows when this village started anymore, especially with so many who have been taken. All we know is that our families have been here many generations. What can I tell them?

"No, it is not another gang or town or anything like that. They just...are. They have always been here and they will always be here."

When Iskra relayed my words, one of the soldiers behind the sergeant chuckled and said something to him. The other soldiers chuckled, but Sergeant Patterson did not. I noticed that, but I was still curious what he said. I asked Iskra to tell me.

He said, "The men wonder if this is a superstition. A ghost story that is told to scare children."

A ghost story? Who would tell someone a make-believe story about ghosts? That made no sense. We lived in terror of the Sleeping and to tell a story that wasn't real about ghosts made no sense at all. I told Iskra this. He shared it with the men whose grins and chuckles started to disappear. They all looked at me and the face I was making. I guess it conveyed that I was not joking.

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"Tell me about the Sleeping," Sergeant Patterson asked.

Looking around to see if anyone from my village was near, even though I knew they weren't and that I should be running away, too, I felt compelled to share what I knew. So that they knew. More so that Sergeant Patrick Patterson knew.

Through Iskra I told them about the Sleeping. About the mist that comes in. About having to hide and make no noise. Even about the friends, family, and neighbors who have been taken who didn't keep quiet.

When I finished, none of the soldiers were laughing or talking amongst themselves. They simply stared at me, listening to every word Iskra translated for them. After a few moments of tense silence, they all spoke at once to the sergeant. He had to yell to keep them from getting carried away. He spoke in strong and steady words that seemed to strengthen the resolve of the men. They all started nodding and standing a little taller as he spoke. When he finished, he turned back to me and said, "When do these Sleeping come?"

I was crestfallen. They asked the question I was hoping they wouldn't. I was hoping beyond hope that my descriptions were enough words of warning that they'd leave and not ask the one question I didn't want them to ask.

"No," I said in a low voice. "No, don't ask me that. Please...don't ask me that."

The sergeant knelt down and looked me in the eye. I was shorter than some of my friends so I was easier to see directly from this vantage point.

"These soldiers need me to find a way back to our base. They need for me to keep them safe. If you are saying that something here is dangerous, I have to know what that is. Please, tell me when they are coming."

I looked back into Sergeant Patrick Patterson's eyes with tears welling up in mine. He didn't understand. None of them did. It was then that I knew our area was different.

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It was then that I knew my home was different from their home. If they knew, if they truly knew, they would never ask this.

“You don’t understand,” I told him. The tears falling down my cheeks. “They will come the moment...”

“What?” he asked in Iskra’s voice. “What does that mean?”

I hung my head and stared at the ground.

It was too late.

It was too late for them.

It was too late for us.

The mist was here.

I watched its first tendrils of wispy white thread between the sergeant’s feet then flow over mine.

“Too late. We were too loud.”

I turned and ran. I heard the sergeant yell after me at the same time as the voices of the other soldiers started to raise when they saw the mist roll in and over the area from the forest.

I ran as hard as I could straight for our cellar door. I yanked it open and saw my mother and sister already huddled in the dark corner near the jars of pickles. I jumped in and turned for a moment, regrettably, to see the soldiers before I shut the door. My eyes met his. The sergeant was still looking at me as I ran away from him and now, just as I was about to hide, we locked on each other. His confusion was high; my concern was higher. I said, “I’m sorry,” as the door shut, cutting off our gaze.

To this day, I have no idea if he knew what I said, but somewhere deep inside I think he knew. Sometimes a look says more than a language ever could.

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I ran to my mother and sister, huddled down with them and did my best to control my sobs. I was sobbing because of what I knew was coming. Not the Sleeping, but losing the sergeant. Something about him was connected to me in ways I still don't understand.

We huddled down in the dark, holding our breath in as much as we could dare. Exhaling in small, slow breaths and inhaling even slower. All to hide our sound. Our noise. Our life.

The Sleeping know the sound of life. They hear it, and they awaken. They want it more than I know I could ever want anything. It isn't a hunger. What is more than a hunger? Desire doesn't cover enough. Amplify hunger and desire to the point of hysteria and then you can start to see.

The soldiers didn't know this. They should have known it, if they were a part of my world. But, sadly, they weren't. They didn't know and couldn't survive what was coming. No matter their strength or bravery, the Sleeping were going to take them.

I clenched my eyes shut, concentrating on my breathing. I couldn't stop my hearing, however. I could hear all of it.

The soldiers were yelling something in ever rising voices. Not just in volume, but in pitch, too. They sounded panicked, which I remember thinking was unusual because I had always thought a soldier was too well trained for that. I heard the Sergeant's voice. I couldn't understand what he was saying, but I knew his voice.

Daring for a moment, in between the time to exhale, I opened my eyes to peek at the door. A small sliver of light was there, allowing me to see between the floor and the door what was happening on the ground outside. At first, I wondered why the light was still so bright since the mist usually created a darkening around the area. I wondered if maybe we were panicked for nothing. Then I saw the first tendril of mist snake its way past the door. Small slivers, caught in the eddy of air current between the cellar and the

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outside world, broke off and curled under the door. My eyes shut hard as my heart leapt in my chest.

Shots rang out and I heard more yelling from the soldiers. One even tried to open the cellar door and was banging on it. If it had been the sergeant, I may have considered opening the door.

I heard him yelling to the others in a commanding voice. He didn't sound high-pitched and afraid like the others. He sounded like a person in charge. A leader. They needed one.

A memory of visiting my uncle on his farm near the farthest edge of the village came to mind. My father thought it would be good for me to see what it takes to get food on our plates and part of that was being there for the slaughter of pigs. When my uncle started to round up the five pigs he was going to kill that day, they seemed to know. He didn't say anything or come at them with a knife. He simply shepherded them into a pen, similar to something they did every day. But today, they seemed to know it was different and started screaming in ever-heightening squeals. The noise hit my spine and made me shudder. I was different after that day. Since then, I know what it sounded like when something knew it was going to die.

These soldiers made that noise.

A scream pierced the air, followed promptly by lots of shots fired.

Another scream echoed the first.

More shots.

The panic and confusion could be heard in the voice of a soldier. He was yelling something and almost seemed to be crying as he did.

The shots stopped for a moment.

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I opened my eyes again, just long enough to clear the tears and blurriness and see the muddy bare foot of one of the Sleeping step past our cellar door. My eyes shut again and my breath caught in my throat.

It was that day all over again for me. That day when my father didn't make it to the cellar in time.

He was moving the logs, the same ones the soldiers sat on, to set them up to chop. He had a log angled up in his arms, his face straining with the effort. I can remember seeing it as I screamed for him to run. When I did, he turned his head to see the mist rolling in and the shadows of the Sleeping not far behind. He dropped the log, which hit his leg, causing him to tumble forward. He looked at me and yelled, "RUN!" in a voice so loud, I still wake up in the night hearing it.

I ran to the cellar, joined my mother and sister and waited for my father to come join us. He didn't.

It was then I experienced what I didn't know about the Sleeping, personally. I'd heard the stories between adults when they didn't know I was listening. Where they said that the true pain of the Sleeping is the anguish they bring to the survivors. They said they could hear their loved ones dying and that the Sleeping did everything they could to remove any trace of the person. No tattered bits of clothing, no discarded shoes or hats, nothing. Not even blood. It was rumored that they seemed intent on removing all trace of the person they took so that it hurt the survivors that much more. Nothing to remember of them and nothing to bury. Just gone.

My father called my mother's name in as calm a voice as I'd ever heard him use. She naturally didn't respond, but I remember hearing her breathing catch in her throat as I held my head close to her chest. He called two more times then I never heard him again.

My friend's mother was also taken by the Sleeping the day. She called out to him, too. When they finally emerged from their house, his mother's head scarf was laying on

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the ground with something scrawled in the dirt next to it. No one knows what it said because his father removed the scarf and covered the words as quickly as he could, but it tore something in my friend. He was never the same after that day. I believed the adults then about how the anguish of the survivors must be what the Sleeping want most.

Another scream brought me back to the moment. This one started and traveled from behind my home all the way into the forest. Quickly, the voice seemed to traverse the distance in only seconds.

More shots and Sergeant Patterson yelling something.

This continued for another few minutes, silence punctuating the moments between screams. Each scream sounding like it was prompted by the worst terror of their lives. The sound fading into the forest far beyond.

After the last few shots, the silence came crashing into the area. No wind, birds, or soldiers could be heard. Finally, a sound like a stone being dragged over another stone could be heard in the forest. Then another one, and another.

The Sleeping.

They didn't speak, or at least not in a way we understood. This sound, from what our remaining elders tell us, is the sound they make when they are fully awake. The sound that signals they have found what they want and are going to be finished soon.

The soldiers, however, did not know this sound. How could they, not being from this world? I heard one yell angrily then fire a single rifle four times. The fourth hit something. I could hear the resolute 'thunk' of a bullet sinking into something. Something that made a sound different than when a bullet hits the trunk of a tree. This was softer, like when we throw stones into the giant puddles of mud after heavy rains.

The Sleeping responded by stopping their noise all together. The silence flowed back in, and I could swear I heard a soldier heave in ragged breaths.

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Another sound, like when my uncle cut into the first dead pig, could be heard and the soldier who I thought I heard breathe made a grunt of a noise. The Sergeant yelled something and more shots rang.

More pig slaughter noises came through until the rifles stopped firing.

Then it happened. What happens every time the Sleeping come back.

"Patrik..."

No, no, no, I thought.

"Patrik..."

It's not him, I repeated to myself. My eyes tightened to the point of pain.

Iskra repeated a third time, "Patrik...come...here..."

I wanted to run to the door and yell with all the strength I could, 'No!' but I knew that would just seal the fate of not only myself, but my mother and sister, too. Our father was already taken by the Sleeping. I couldn't bear the thought of them going, too, especially when it would be my fault. So, I waited for it to stop.

"Patrik...come...Patrik...come..."

This repeated every few seconds for a while before I heard something heavy get dragged through the grass towards the forest.

Iskra won't be speaking to me anymore, I thought.

"Patrik..."

No...please...don't...

"Patrik..." was all I was able to understand because the remaining words were foreign, but I knew the voice of Sergeant Patterson, and that it wasn't Sergeant Patterson anymore.

"Patrik..."

The stories tell of the Sleeping finding a name within the thoughts of their victims and using that to bait others to come out. I had forever hoped my name would never

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be uttered. Especially not after I heard my father call my mother in the same way two years ago. She cried for nearly three days after that and wouldn't speak to anyone for nearly a month. It broke her, as I understand it now. I never wanted to feel that as I watched at my mother's reaction in sorrow.

Now it was happening to me from a person I had never known until that day. The irony is, I would never know him.

The sound of the Sleeping 'voices' built and into a crescendo, then drifted back to silence. A few moments after, the sounds of dozens of foots steps on the soft grass, then the dead leaves and underbrush of the forest. When it sounded like they were nearly gone, I heard him one last time.

"Patrik...he is yours...thank you..."

My eyes shot open and I stared at the door. The Sergeant's voice, in a language I understood. My mind reeled in confusion. How was that possible? I was confused by the words, too, but I was more confused as to how the Sergeant could speak Croatian suddenly.

I watched under the cellar door as the mist retreated, heading back to the forest. I waited an agonizing amount of time until my mother whispered, "It is OK now."

Jumping up, I ran to the door, threw it open and leapt out into the yard. Scanning madly around, hoping I would see Sergeant Patterson one more time, I only saw the empty yard and the forest beyond. Walking to where I last saw the soldiers, I could see the empty bullet casings littered about. Here and there I saw rifles laying in the grass, too, their barrels twisted and the internal mechanisms broken. Other than those, there was no trace of the soldiers. It was like they were never there.

I hung my head and cried. I cried because I never got to know Sergeant Patrick Patterson. I never got to hear him tell me anything more than his name. For some reason (one I will never find an answer to) we had instantly connected. Him a soldier in

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charge of a squad, and me a ten year-old boy in a village he never should have seen. We never should have known the other existed.

But we did, and that made the misery worse.

My depression paused for just a moment when I heard my sister and mother gasp. Since my emotions were high I immediately assumed we were still in danger and turned quickly towards them. They both stood there, staring past me, my sister hiding behind my mother. My mother pointed and said, "Patrik...look."

Following their gaze and her point, I looked to the log where the soldiers had sat just minutes before. There on the log sat something small and green. I cocked my head to the side as I tried to figure out what it was.

Then I understood why my friend's father erased the words scrawled in the ground next to his mother's head scarf. The Sleeping wanted us to know they can take something of ours without fear of reprisal or retribution. They take and we are left without.

There on the log was a small, embroidered piece of cloth I had seen not long before. A name I recognized but was still foreign sewn into it with black block letters.

PATTERSON

Next to it, which I can safely say is what made my family gasp, was a word etched into the wood. The etching was jagged and splintered, as if something sharp but unwieldy had attempted to carve it.

The word, in Croatian was 'yours.'

I collapsed to my knees and cried.