

## CHAPTER 17

**W**hen Dieter awoke, he was inside a tent. He twisted his head to the side and saw that other men were in the cots around him, all of them apparently wounded. This was some sort of field hospital. He tried to remember everything. He had given up a few times, out there on that hill—or was all that a dream? He couldn't think what had happened. How had he gotten here? The pain was back now, the wound in his side only the center place of a vast ache that spread all through him. He tried to shift a little, to see more of what was around him, but the pain gouged him and he knew he couldn't do that. He breathed smoothly several times, and then he asked, "What's going on?"

He didn't know who was there, whom he was asking. But a man next to him, on a cot not a foot away, said, "What do you mean?"

Dieter didn't know what he meant, so he waited, slept a little more, tried to get the

confusion out of his head. And at some point he awoke once again, aching, full of fire, and a man was standing over him. A medic. "How did I get here?" Dieter asked.

"I don't know," the man said, and Dieter could hear that he didn't really care. "We've closed you up the best we could. But you need surgery. We're going to move you when we can."

"Will I die?"

"I don't know."

"Did Schaefer bring me here?"

He didn't answer. He was a man with red in his beard, a week's worth of growth. But he had no life left in him, in his eyes. He walked away.

Dieter slept again, and he awakened with Sergeant Franke looking at him. "Hedrick, how are you?" he asked.

Dieter didn't know. He felt strange. When he looked at the sergeant, he knew that something had changed, and he was embarrassed, but he didn't know exactly what the change was, what had happened to him. Then he realized that he wasn't in the war, that he didn't want to be in the war, that he had quit the war out on the hill in the snow. "Where's Schaefer?" he asked.

"Dead."

"On the hill?"

"Yes." Dieter felt this—felt as though he had lost half his world. He didn't know who cared about him now, could hardly remember his parents. "That's why he didn't come for me," Dieter mumbled, and it seemed as though he had always known that.

"Most of us were hit, Dieter. I took a bullet through my shoulder. That's why I'm here."

Dieter had noticed the sling, but now he saw the change in his sergeant's face.

"It's not so bad, Dieter. We can go home. By the time you're better, the war might be over."

"I'm going to have surgery. A medic told me that."

"I know. But you'll be all right. That's what the doctor told me."

"An American tried to help me."

"What?"

It was the first time Dieter had remembered it, and yet the knowledge had been in his head all while he was trying to wake up. "Out there on the hill. An American came down to me, and he bandaged me. He put his belt around me to hold the bandage tight."

"I don't think so, Dieter. You were hallucinating."

"No. He was young. Like a Hitler Youth boy. But he was an American."

"A medic?"

"No. Just a soldier. But they shot him. I think they killed him."

"Who did?"

"Our soldiers. The ones who came for me. They said the American was taking me prisoner."

"Yes. Of course he was. It was right to kill him."

"No."

"Dieter, many people die in war. You can't think about this all your life."

Dieter tried to think about that. But he knew the truth, and he told it to himself: "I will think about it all my life."

The army wasn't shipping bodies home from Europe. Spence was buried in Belgium. But at home a service was held to honor him. Half the people in Brigham City came. Everyone knew the Morgans.

The Mormon bishop, a dear friend of the family named Heber Stott, opened the meeting, after a prayer, by offering a tribute. "This boy could have stayed home," he said. "He was young



enough, and if he had wanted to, he could have stayed around here a little longer. But he believed in the great freedoms we all love in this country. He knew that he had to defend our nation against the Nazis—Satan's warriors. He knew that if he didn't do it, someone else would have to go, so he stepped up and said, 'Let me do my share. Let me face the enemy and show them that they can't spread their evil across this world.' So today we honor this noble young man, who freely gave his life for our freedom. He is a hero, and his name will be remembered in this town forever."

The Morgans sat together, all in a line. Robert was home for the funeral, wearing his navy dress whites. Louise was holding on to Evelyn and Betty, one under each arm. Dad and Mom had Lloyd between them, holding him up. The boy had cried for three days straight.

"Spencer went to war, but he didn't let it corrupt him," the bishop said. "He stayed true to his faith. So there is reason to celebrate today. A young man has met the challenge, has lived righteously and honorably, and will receive his just reward."

LuAnn Crowther was in the congregation,

with her fiancé, Dennis Stevens. They spoke to the Morgans after the meeting. "I've talked to Dennis about it," she said. "If we have a son, we want to name him Spencer. He was such a wonderful boy."

Later that day the family gathered out on the Morgan farm. Lots of relatives came. They all talked about Spence, what a good boy he had always been. But his father, after a time, had heard enough. He went to his room, his and his wife's bedroom, and he sat on the bed.

A letter had come from Spence's sergeant, a man named Pappas. Mr. Morgan took it out from his drawer and read the final paragraph again:

I thought you would want to know how your son died. He crawled from our position onto the field of battle. I don't know what happened exactly, but he was hit by enemy fire. He had told me earlier that he wanted to help a wounded boy he had spotted, a German boy, out in the field, and I had ordered him not to do it. But he went, anyway. It's not the sort of thing a soldier gets a medal for, dying for an enemy, but I'll never forget it as long as I live. None of the men will.

Spencer was everything you must have hoped he would be. I could always tell what a fine family he came from, the way he lived. I'm just sorry this happened.

The Morgans had thought about reading the letter at the memorial service, but they couldn't bring themselves to do it. With all the talk of war, all the hatred of Japs and Germans, who would understand it? What would people think?

But Mr. Morgan thought of all the promises Spence had kept.