

Half Assed

by

Vixxy Fox



“It’s like I have little tiny butt cheeks in my whiskey glass,” William slurred as he held the glass six inches in front of his face. He had a paper due for Professor Claptrap’s Political Science class but he’d decided to take the night off. The drink was exactly how he liked it; just whiskey with two very large ice cubes. “Oh look,” he continued, “One of the cubes is partially melted so that butt cheek is only half there.”

The bar tender made a mental note not to serve this particular customer any more drinks; unless of course it was plain water.

The inebriated teen began to sing softly,

“I’ve got a glass ‘o whiskey that’s half empty.
I got a glass ‘o whiskey that’s half full.
I got a lonely old half assed ice cube
In that half and half glass,
And just like me it’s got no class.

I wish I could change things up
I wish I could change things down
And yet here I sit in the middle
Like some old half assed clown.”

With the completion of his song the half assed world of college student William Brass faded to the oblivion of whiskey driven blackness.

When William came back to consciousness he was first aware of the bitter chill to the air. Then his body reacted hard to its abuse and he became immediately sick. The contents of his stomach spurted uncontrollably from his mouth and he was in real danger of choking to death except that strong hands rolled him over and lifted him at the hips so he was in a bowed praying position.

“Puke it all out,” a hard voice told him, “You’ll feel better for it. It’ll help keep you alive too. Alcohol poisoning is a bad way to go. Imagine a head stone that only reads, ‘Town Drunk’.”

After a few more good heaves William managed to get up on his knees. Once there he wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his shirt. It was night and the only illumination was a full moon.

“Eat some snow,” the voice told him. “It’s not a cure but it’ll help.”

“Where am I?”

“Korea.”

There was a quiet pause and then William looked up at the person who’d just helped him. He was about to say that was ‘nuts’ but what he saw was even more nuts and it stopped his mind cold. The fellow was dressed in an army uniform; drab green and lumpy where additional material had been stuffed in for warmth. On his poncho were Sergeant’s stripes and when he breathed smoke like tendrils came from his nose. His outfit was completed by a green metal helmet and a rifle slung over his shoulder. He looked to be the same age or at the most just a few years older than he was himself and his face was stubbled with whiskers.

“It’s fucking cold,” the teen muttered.

The soldier swung out and slapped William’s face, knocking him back to the ground. “That’s for cursing,” he growled. “You don’t curse in my platoon. That way when you die there’s no apologizing to God when you meet him.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m your grandfather,” the man replied.

“That’s not possible, my grandfather died in...”

“Korea,” the soldier finished for him, “Get used to it. Now you need to get yourself moving or you’re going to freeze to death. I was given one half assed chance to make a difference in your life and I intend to do just that. The only problem we’ve got is something God referred to as my ‘challenge’. To help you I was restricted to the time and place of my death. In other words; I have to relive it.”

“You’d do that for me?” William asked, getting back up on his knees.

“You’re here aren’t you?”

“Sure... and pinch me to see if I wake up.”

The soldier none too gently punched him in the nose, knocking his grandson to the snowy ground where he sat on his backside, tears forming in his eyes. Leaning over William, who was now forced to deal with the blood running from his nostrils, the man smiled and asked him, “So what do you think now? Are you dreaming?”

Grabbing him by the collar the soldier hauled him to his feet. “Time to march soldier; before I lose you to the weather and not even the Chinese. Can you feel your toes?”

“Dey urt,” the teen complained through a pinched off nose.

“Good... that means you might not lose any of’em. We need to get you outfitted. You’re not going to like how we do that, but it’s all we have.”

After walking a hundred yards or so, they were challenged by a voice that hissed out from the darkness.

“Orange.”

“Blue.”

“Come ahead Sarge. You got him?”

“Yeah... I got him. He’s not much to look at but I got him.”

The snow crunched under their feet as they moved in to where the soldiers had created a defensive position. “The Chinese are a tough bunch,” his grandfather said softly, “And they’ve been trying like hell to move through here so they can roll on through our less defended rear lines. We’ve been holding the hill for three days now waiting for some sort of relief to show up. So far we got zip.”

“Why do you stay?” William asked.

“Do not make me punch you in the nose again,” the soldier told him, stopping in front of a snow covered mound. “Under this snow are my friends and brothers. They died holding this piece of dirt. We leave now and their death means nothing.” Kneeling he began brushing the white powder away. “We’ll need to strip what we need from their bodies; and don’t pay any attention to size... we just need to get you covered.”

William, shivering with the cold, pulled on every scrap of clothing his grandfather handed him and would have donned more if there was any. In the distance a bugle called out in a flat sounding note. A distance away another bugle echoed the same note and then another and another.

“What’s that?” William asked.

“That’s who’s going to be at our throats in a little bit. They’re moving into position for a charge. They’ll try to overrun us.”

The teen saw a hulking mound in the soft light of the moon and recognized it as a tank. “What about...”

“Kayo’d. It’s just a frozen hulk. Even if you tried, the machine guns won’t even train. This is strictly hand to hand.” He tossed William a helmet. “That was Private Smith’s... you wear it knowing he died for you.”

“I didn’t even know him.”

“And he didn’t know you; but that doesn’t alter the fact that he died doing his duty. History might not treat this war fairly but like any war; it was fought for a reason. We were here because we believed in that reason which just happens to be our country.”

“Professor Claptrap says...”

The Sergeant rose with a speed that belied his cold soaked body and grabbed his grandson by the front of his shirt, pulling him close. “You pay attention to my words!” he hissed. “For that guy the glass is always half empty! Claptrap never served and never loved anything other than his own warped views of ‘how things should be’. He’s rewritten a history of something he never lived just to defy the truth. I know what he’s told you about what we did here. That he’s even able to speak those lies let alone teach them is because of guys like us. You listen to him and you start believing everything is topsy turvey; right is wrong and wrong is right. In his perfect form of the world you don’t even need to work; everything just gets handed to you on a silver platter just because you deserve it. Wake up call... look around and drink the coffee. If you’re not willing to work you’re going to starve. Top that thought off with the question; ‘If you’re not willing to fight for what you believe in then how valid can it be?’”

A rifle shot echoed out and off of the distant hills. ‘Misfire’ was called out and the building tension eased just a little with muffled laughter.

“Do I get a rifle?” William asked through chattering teeth.

“No. I doubt you’d even know what to do with it if I gave you one. Your job is watching. Just try to remember what you’ve seen.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s important,” his grandfather told him. “Time to check the line... then we wait. I don’t think it’ll be long now. Stay low.”

Working their way from the right flank to the left the pair greeted each soldier making sure of their ammunition supply and general wellbeing. The situation was inevitably the same; the soldiers were near frozen to death and barely holding on. As the pair moved, they were totally exposed to the elements and enemy fire which occasionally buzzed past like angry bees. Finally they arrived at the far left flank where two soldiers huddled in a shallow foxhole. Snow had begun falling obscuring vision to a mere ten feet. The pass code was exchanged after which William and his grandfather slid into the foxhole with the waiting soldiers.

“How you guys doing?” the Sergeant asked.

“How do you think we’re doing?” growled one of the pair. “It’s tempting just to go to sleep and never wake up. If I go to hell at least I’ll be warm.” He held a hand out to William. “Call me Chicago,” he said, “My helper here is Gunther.”

“Ya... goot to meet you,” the other soldier said.

“You’re German?” William asked, shaking his hand after Chicago’s.

“How coot you tell?” the soldier joked.

“But... why are you here?”

The Privates exchanged looks and then Gunther told him, “Citizenship. I am no longer a German... I am American, eh William?”

The Sergeant placed a hand on his shoulder, “And no better American have I ever met.”

The college student looked at his grandfather. “Your name is William?”

“Who do you think you were named after?”

With those words, a grenade plopped down right in the middle of their little group. Without a word, Sergeant William Brass jumped on it, smothering the explosive burst with his body.

Fighting was hand to hand and brutally violent. Unlike before, the enemy now used the snowfall as cover and did not signal their advance with bugles. In the end, only three of the platoon were left alive. In that desperate moment relief finally arrived.

William woke in the front seat of his car shivering uncontrollably. His car keys were dangling from the rearview mirror and these were hastily stuffed into the ignition and the heater placed on full blast.

In reviewing the term papers later that day, Professor Claptrap was surprised by a two sentence paper submitted by the student he’d considered his most promising acolyte.

“Would you give your life fighting to defend what you believe? If the answer is no then you are a liar.”

Unsure of exactly what this meant, and feeling it was just a bit more than half assed, he gave the paper an ‘A’ since he wanted to ensure William’s progress towards his Masters and thus a future towards what he taught.

Later that same day William found himself in Washington DC. The sun was beginning to set as he stood gazing upon the Korean War Veteran’s Memorial. The individuals portrayed by the statues looked very familiar. Every other tourist had left the area long ago and he sat alone on one of the park benches. He was then surprised when a very ancient sounding voice said in a German accent, “I was there. I remember you. You were my Sergeant. You saved my life.”

“That would be impossible Grandfather,” a female voice countered.

William turned to the voice and found a very old man sitting in a wheel chair pushed by a very pretty girl. “Gunther?” he asked.

“Ya... that would be me. Do you remember me Sergeant? You have not changed much I think. Have you come to take me to the Platoon?”

The college student extended his hand and the old man gripped it firmly. “That would have been my grandfather, sir. Thank you for your service. You did your country proud.”

“We did not so much change the world as we simply stood fast, ya? God forgive me but sometimes I question what we did.”

“You fought for what you believed in. You made a difference.”

“Ya... we did that. Und now I am to meet with the President whose name I can never remember. Sometimes I think it would be better if they were the ones fighting in the front line, ya?” He laughed softly and then added, “But I am an American so the glass is still half full, yes?”

Looking to the lone figures poised in their march across the park, William replied, “That much I think has never changed.”

Author’s note: I never know where a story is going to go until it gets there. In this time of political unrest; which I feel is so much stronger than the usual. Regardless of who I might feel would be a good leader, my heart goes out to the serviceman and woman who inevitably become the cannon fodder of those chose to lead – no matter the country reflected upon.

They are the ones who keep us safe and inevitably pay the price for this.

If I was to give any advice to the reader of this story it would be: Take no one's word as truth. Think for yourself and find your own answers. Then vote accordingly.

If you are in the military or served in the past, may God bless you and keep you in His love forever.



Korean War Veteran's Memorial, Washington DC

The Korean War Memorial was dedicated in 1995, on the 42nd anniversary of the armistice that ended the conflict. The memorial consists of 19 statues of soldiers representing a squad on patrol, drawn from each branch of the Armed Forces. The 19 figures create a reflection on the wall, symbolizing the border between North and South Korea: the 38th parallel.

Forty two years for this memorial to be built.

It breaks my heart.