

grey desert sand

By feight

Submitted: March 13, 2007

Updated: March 13, 2007

a serious short story about a man living in a base during war time.

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/feight/44111/grey-desert-sand>

Chapter 1 - grey desert sand

2

1 - grey desert sand

Grey desert sand

By: Freya Freytag

With slow tired movements the soldier sank to the ground, and sat. It was not a very lovely place to sit. Beneath the thin layer of greyish sand he could feel the hard concrete stone. The solid wall which he leaned upon was made of concrete too, and together with the opposing wall formed a small and narrow hallway, dimly lit, by one single lamp, which hung from the ceiling. The lamp softly swung because of the breeze of dry air that passed through the hall.

Luckily enough the soldier was not a claustrophobe. Such a person would not last long in there. Not only because of the small and narrow hallways and rooms that were so sullen and dark, but also by the terrifying idea that just above his head, above the concrete ceiling lay three metres of desert sand. Even though the man did not fear the possibility of the roof collapsing, the walls closing in on him, or any other fear a claustrophobe may hold, he cursed everyday he had to spend in this godforsaken place. The conditions were terrible. They were from the beginning so, and only continued to worsen. Every day there was a scarcity of food. Small supplies came only once a month. One time a day the soldiers gathered in the cramped space of the cafeteria and got a meager meal that would have to provide energy for the entire day. And at the end of the month, when they were almost without food, maybe even two days. But even scarcer than the food was water, although that was not surprising considering they were in the middle of a desert. The soldiers did get enough water a day to survive. However it did not lessen the thirst. Bathing and washing was not an option, since the day they had arrived in this waterless place they had't washed once. The rare times it ever rained were the only times there was a "shower". Hygiene was not to be found on the base, which caused diseases and illnesses to occur, that spread fast with all the soldiers living cramped up in a small space. Even though the infected persons were immediately isolated, almost as many people died of diseases as on the battlefield. The first aid was concentrated on the wounded, leaving the ill no chance but to die under the harsh conditions of the base. And as the soldier experienced at this very moment, there was a lack of decent sitting places. All these were terrible conditions. These were terrible times. It was a time of war. The whole war and all its destructive effects and conditions had bothered the soldier every second, minute, hour of the days that had passed since his first arrival on the base, and his first contact with the terrors of war. The images of his previous peaceful life, now destroyed, haunted his mind often, being confronted with these new trials so unlike his past life. He disliked the new one, but it was the life he led now, and it would not change as long as the war lasted. Still it bothered him most of the time, but not now, he was too tired to even bother, or be bothered by anything. Every place to sit was now an excellent place to sit. The reason behind his tiredness was, of course, the war, but more specifically the reason was that he had been fighting non-stop for 16 hours. Enemies had tried to breach the western part of the outer wall, again. The enemies seemed to consist of a neverending number of soldiers who tried to breach the wall every day. And every day, with much effort, they were fended off. The soldiers afterwards returned to the base tired, knowing the next day they would return again. Today the battle had been fiercer than ever, the enemies had fought relentlessly. However, like all other days, they were fended off. Why they tried so hard and relentlessly to conquer the wall, and conquer the entire country, no one knew. The reason for

the enemy to attack was unknown. However that did not stop the soldier from fending them off anyway. He was defending his country, and his son, and he had been doing that today , 16 hours long non-stop. When the enemies finally had retreated ,the exhausted soldier had gone immediately on his way to his sleeping quarters. However on his way there he couldn't take the exhaustion anymore so he had sunk to the ground. Now he sat here,slowly regaining his strength.

He was still in his army uniform that was covered with the greyish desert sand the strong desert winds had blown on him. The desert wind tormented the soldiers if they were forced to fight on the front. They had special goggles so at least their eyes were protected, and they could see their enemies. His goggles lay beside him. The glass was scratched by the scraping of sand in the wind on it. The sand had covered him entirely. It was everywhere : in his military boots, on his shirt, in his pants. The greyish sand was also in his hair , making his light brown hair look grey, and so much older. The war had changed him. He was only 45 but he already looked and felt like a 60 year old war veteran .The sand began to make his body ache.He would love to just wash it off with a relaxing cold shower, but, of course, with the sanitation being how it was , that wasn't possible. With his hand he tried to at least get the sand out of his hair, unsuccessfully.

Again the images of his past peaceful life haunted him: his beautiful home, where he had had the opportunity to shower every day, where he wasn't plagued by the terrible desert winds and the sand they blew in his face, and now itched his body incredibly. Oh how he hated the sand! He also hated the desert, full of that annoying sand and the bothersome winds, but also because it was his battlefield, where he had lost many comrades, good men he knew. In fact he hated the whole war, the loss it has caused him. The loss of everything, everyone, except Mathew, his son. Mathew had survived that day, he had not ceased to live.

"However it won't be for long till he dies if the war continues." The soldier thought grimly. He thought this because if the war lasted longer, the backup troops would be used. Not long after the soldier had joined the army,with the idea to protect his son this way, the military had decided to force all young men , including his son, into the back up troops in case one of the fronts fell. The backup troops contained only young inexperienced men. They wouldn't last a day if put on the front against the enemy. In his eyes Mathew was as good as dead. He could only hope the war would reach its end before the backup troops were placed.

The soldier began to stand up. The hard concrete floor was becoming a pain in the butt. Again he headed for his sleeping quarters. Perhaps that Riley was there. Riley, his roommate, would be able to tell him the exact positions and actions of the backup troops. He always knew all about every troop. This was because he was the "message boy" of the base, or "informant" as he preferred to call it. His duty was to transfer the messages from one general to another. This is how he acquired his valuable information. But a lot of the things Riley told weren't exactly things the generals would send to each other .The soldier had his suspicions that Riley listened to some closed doors on the base. And Riley , being the rumour spreading, talkative person he is, made sure that more people than the generals heard all of the information.

The man opened the door to his sleeping quarters that he shared with Riley, half expecting for him to be there. However, he was not, probably out delivering messages. The room was completely empty apart from two beds and a small table with a candle. The candle served as the only light in the quarters. It wasn't lit. The lighting in the hall outside his quarters was not bright so it did not even cast any light into the darkness of the room. He did not even bother to light the candle. If Riley wasn't here he could just as well lie down and rest a bit, and this way he wouldn't waste the little supply of candles they had. He stretched out on the hard wooden bed, with only a thin cloth mattress to give a little comfort.At least it was better than the concrete. The bed ,like most of the things in the base, was covered with the grey sand. Of course it didn't help that he now lay on it with his still sandy uniform. Riley's bed and uniform

were free of sand. He was the only one in the base who had no need to go outside in the desert. Even the generals slept on sand-covered beds. The aching annoying desert sand, oh how he hated it. He tried to relax and sleep on the hard bed, but the itching of the sand, and the troubles about the war in the back of his mind kept him from creating an island of peace in the sea of war. In the end he succeeded, not in sleeping, but in getting some rest. His thoughts drifted away. But it didn't take long before the rest was disturbed.

Suddenly the door burst violently open, and Riley stepped in, as always with a lot of sound, immediately disturbing the soldier's peaceful rest. Riley was still young and flamboyant, somewhere in his thirties he guessed, never having bothered to ask Riley his age. His curly blond hair and blue eyes only accentuated the youth.

"Douglass, my man !" he said loudly, slamming the door behind him, and immediately took a match and lit the candle. He then walked to his sandless bed, opposite of Douglass', and sat on it. "I have been searching for you all day long. Where were you?" Riley asked a simple and polite question. However it irritated Douglass endlessly.

"I was busy fighting on the front all day, saving the country. I didn't see you there." Douglass' frustration was barely hidden. It had always bothered him that while he was risking his life, Riley was just be "running around" delivering messages. He viewed Riley as a wimp, and thought he wouldn't survive a day on the front. Douglass had little respect for him. He thought Riley wasn't worthy of wearing a military uniform or being called a soldier. Riley, of course, knew this but it didn't matter to him. He calmly answered.

"You know we both serve the country. I just do it in a different way. We have discussed this before. I haven't been searching for you all day to have this discussion. I come bearing important news." Riley really enjoyed bringing news. It didn't matter to him if it was good or bad. To Douglass it didn't matter what Riley's "important news" was. He wasn't really interested. Riley was as observant as ever and saw this, thus added "This news concerns you, Douglass."

"Doesn't war concern us all?" Douglass replied dryly.

"I guess it does , but this news concerns you more personally. Now do you want to hear the news or not?" Riley became impatient. He really wanted to tell the news.

"Is it good or bad news?" Douglass asked

"Both," Riley answered. Douglass grunted and lifted himself into sitting position. He was going to listen to what Riley had to say. Maybe it did concern him.

"Well, tell!" Douglass said. Riley was happy to hear he could tell his news. He, as always, began with the bad news.

" Yesterday something terrible happened. This morning I was informed that the Eastern front has fallen. We're the last outpost guarding the outer wall." The last statement was unnecessary. Douglass knew what it meant if the eastern front fell, as it had now. It would mean the enemy's force would be fully concentrated on the western front , his front. It explained why there had been more enemies today. It would also mean that this may have been the last real rest he had, even if it was little. He had been expecting this for some time. One of the fronts would fall. That was clear. It had been the eastern. Douglass wouldn't call it luck that it wasn't his front that had fallen, because this would mean more work for him.

"I don't see how this concerns me," Douglass said. This did concern him in a way but it wasn't news he cared about. He had hardened during the war. Almost nothing got to him anymore. He was coldhearted now, almost emotionless.

"The good news concerns you, Douglass." This amazed Douglass. How could there be good news in his life? The only good news that he wanted , but didn't expect to hear was that the war had ended. " Being the last outpost guarding the outer wall, we need reinforcements to fend off the enemy. The back up

troops are coming. You will see your son again, Douglass!" Riley saw this as good news. The reunion of father and son in times of war. Well, it was not. Douglass thought this terrible news. It was equal to announcing his son was dead. When Douglass' facial expression wasn't one of joy or even longing to see his son, Riley got confused.

"Is something wrong, Douglass?" Riley asked, concerned. He knew that Douglass was a cold and calm man so he wasn't surprised when he didn't even blink at the announcement of the fall of the eastern front, which was terrible news. But when he had announced what he thought was a ray of hope, Douglass' facial expression became even more solemn than usual, and showed signs of grief. What was it that made him react this way to good news?

"Cursed war!" Douglass muttered, lay down on the bed again, turned his back on Riley and spoke no more.

Riley having shared his news ,and still having a duty to fullfil walked out of the room, but first blew out the candle ,turning the room into its solemn dark state again. He left Douglass alone in the dark , knowing that was what he preferred ; darkness, solitude.

When Douglass awoke after dreams of darkness and pain, of long lost hope and love, he saw a surprising sight. Riley was on his bed. his hair, his uniform and his bed were covered with the greyish desert sand. His usually bright blue eyes were darker and red, like he had been crying. And on his lap there was something that absolutely did not belong there: a gun.

"Are you going to commit suicide?" Douglass calmly asked. Riley looked at him sadly, like he had not heard the words Douglass had spoken.

With a trembling voice he spoke

"Your son is dead." Douglass didn't even blink. The only thought that went through his head at that moment was why Riley was crying if it was his son that had died. He had already mourned the death of his son last night. He had known this would happen. Riley spoke again with trembling voice. There was more to it than only the death of Douglas' son. " The reinforcements have been intercepted by enemy forces and all killed. There are too few men to fight on the front. I've been fired from my messenger duty. I fight on the front now!" He burst into tears. "I don't even know how to operate this thing!" he cried, holding out the gun he held in his hands. Douglass took it and loaded it and gave it back to Riley.

"Here you go" he said. Riley looked at him, bewildered. What Douglass was doing made no sense to him. His son has died , he doesn't even react, and now he loads the gun. What for? "Use it against your enemies or use it on yourself. Either way you're going to die." Douglass bluntly said. Riley was clearly shocked by his words. Was this a human being he looked upon? Douglass didn't act human nor did he show any emotion or reaction to the terrible news.

" You're cold. Is there nothing that you believe in anymore?" Riley cried out, shocked, what had happened that made Douglass act this way? Had he no faith at all? No hope.

"No, I do not believe in this war, nor in the people that fight in it. It's all hopeless." It was what Douglass felt. He had given up hope, last night. And even if they won the war, which was unlikely, he would rather die. He now had lost everything, everyone.

"We're going to die, aren't we?" Riley asked, scared. The hope he carried last night had also fled. But he wasn't willing to die like Douglass was. He still had a home, and his family waiting for him.

Douglass looked at him. In his face there was no expression. His eyes were blank. He answered,

"No, we already died a long time ago, the very second this ridiculous war started."

He grabbed a handful of the greyish desert sand. He let the sand slip out of his hand. It slowly fell onto the floor. Almost like an hourglass it announced the passing of hope, the final moment of death approaching, and how all that has been goes to dust, to the greyish desert sand he hated so much.