

It was the strangest thing...

Lauren Marshall, Berkeley Vale Campus TLSC, Year 8

They had been prepared for this since the day they joined the army, so why did she feel guilty now?

It was an odd feeling, barricaded up in a small room with only a gun and her two friends, hiding from the rest of her comrades who now had a death wish against the three traitors.

All of the thoughts and memories from the past 3 years went through her head at a vigorous pace. She felt as though her head would explode with the unpleasantness of it all.

"You have a good head on your shoulders, Annie."

But if that was so, how was she in this situation now? A war was raging on outside, and the people who were once her friends had done a full-180 and become her enemies in an instance.

"We're screwed..." Her boyfriend, Bertoldt, repeated over and over in his sitting position, eyes wide in fear as he ran his hand through his dark hair several times.

"Stop freaking out, Bert," She began before being cut off by him.

"How can you say that, Annie? We're in a basement room with no windows, we're running out of fresh air and Eren and the others are on the other side of that door, ready to *kill us*, all because we were so stupid as to not take off our *damn jackets!*" He fretted, starting to hyperventilate.

Annie leaned down to him and put her hands on either side of his face, looking into his eyes. She wasn't one for affection, but she knew it calmed him down.

"Look; we're going to get out of here alive. We'll get out of here, and we'll go back home. It'll be fine. We just have to get rid of the brats on the other side of that metal door, and we'll be fine. I promise." She said, tears forming in her eyes.

I wish we'd never been born, and we wouldn't be in this stupid mess. Stupid parents, giving us this stupid life, with no way out. We never wanted to do this, and we always had to be perfect to do all your dirty work, and now we're going to die...

"Annie, we've got a problem," The other man, Reiner, announced nervously, shaking Annie from her thoughts once again.

"Annie! Open the door and you, Reiner and Bertoldt get what you deserve!" A voice, which sounded like Mikasa, boomed on the other side. It was faint; maybe if you didn't focus you mightn't've heard it.

Annie didn't say much else, simply a "No," but a hard bang on the metal door saw some screws coming loose at the door hinges. Bertoldt stayed completely still, sobbing for his life.

He's too delicate for this. Look what this has done to him. No; look what YOU did to him! She thought angrily, and sat on the concrete floor.

They endured a few more painful minutes of silence, Reiner pacing up and down the long room's interior before coming up with an ingenious idea.

"Could we get out through there?" Reiner suggested, pointing towards the ceiling. It looked like peeling linoleum, and generally in these certain buildings, the linoleum was often accompanied by nothing other than planks of wood.

"It- it might just work," She marvelled, eyeing a certain tile about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way peeled.

She stood hastily and grabbed the gun from its position on the floor and kicked a stack of chairs over.

Yeah. There's enough chairs and tables stacked up in here to reach the top; even if only one of us could get up there, we could get the jump on the others and-

She stopped mid-thought. She didn't want to kill any more people than she already did.

"Reiner, help me out over here," Annie called, grabbing two legs of a table attempting to flip it. He ran over as quickly as he could and helped her get the table off of its side.

After 20 minutes or so of stacking, yelling because none-of-your-teammates-are-coordinated-at-all and hitting holes into slats of wood, their work was done.

I knew that escape training we took 6 years ago would help us out sometime in the future.

"Reiner, you're a genius," Annie mused, helping Bertoldt up through the hole.

"Thanks," He smiled, but his smile was sorrowful. He'd made a promise once, and he swore to fulfil it.

Annie crawled up through the hole, and found herself in what looked to be a conference room. Bertoldt was waiting at the door, hand on the handle.

"C'mon, Reiner. We have to get out of here." She hurried, sticking her hand down the gap between the levels. He closed his eyes, shook his head and gave out a light chuckle.

"Look out for Bertoldt for me, ok?" He gently urged, kicking down the tables that they'd worked for so long to stack up.

“No!” Bertoldt shouted, running over to the gap in the floor and hearing the metal bust down. Annie pushed him away as gunfire sounded, the continuous explosion of many weapons being fired ringing in hers and Bertoldt’s ears.

She took his wrist and ran to the other side of the room, throwing open the door and running into the empty hallway.

Strangely... empty.

“We don’t even have our belts... We can’t get out.” Bertoldt cried, following Annie as she ran like a lightning bolt through the corridors of the building she once slept in, once ate in and once lived and socialised with other soldiers in.

What was once her home.

She heard footsteps, and holding Bertoldt’s hand, turned her head without halting her running. She saw someone’s silhouette, the silhouette of a person she knew very well.

Armin Arlert.

Her eyes widened when she saw the gun in his hand, and squinted her eyes as tight as she could when a single gunshot fired. She expected to fall and hit the ground and become cold and lifeless, but instead, felt something heavy fall beside her.

Bertoldt.

Annie stopped dead in her tracks and simply stared at his body, lying on the ground, and felt like a small child.

It was the strangest thing, the strangest feeling. She felt angered and overall ticked off, but immensely sad aswell. As if this whole thing, this whole predicament was her fault. As thought she'd let her feelings get in the way of the mission, her mission.

"Not everyone will survive this war. Most will perish, but those who survive will have done us a great honour. You will have brought honour among your family name."

Yet another shot fired, and Annie could have sworn she saw it fly past her ear. Everything had been thrust into slow motion; her surroundings had blurred and the sound of continuous guns firing invaded her ears, making nothing else matter except that she had to survive.

"Even those who don't survive should die with honour, because we are warriors! We never give up, no matter what!"

She gathered the energy she could and kept running, as much as she could. The stained and aged columns and statues on the sides of the huge corridors were burning into her memory, and she felt 5 piercing pains in her stomach and chest. She fell to the ground, her blonde hair getting into her eyes and felt someone running towards her.

"The world is a cruel, unforgiving place, Annie. Be careful what you do." Her friend explained, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"Sorry, Annie."

The voice had a light chuckle at the end, and she could see his dastardly reflection on the marbled tiles.

She closed her eyes and slipped away into unconsciousness.

"Never forget your mission! You MUST NOT FAIL! Should you happen to be killed, do not give up until the bitter end!"

"Our Annie is elite; she will complete the mission. She is our finest German spy. I'd trust her with my life. If anyone could infiltrate the military and gather important intel, it's Miss Leonhardt."

It was the strangest thing;

She failed.