

# **Judge Not**

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Foreign language denoted with <>

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“Not far, Cajé,” Doc encouraged. The wounded GI nodded his understanding, doing his best to keep up.

When Saunders had forcefully ordered him and Cajé off the field, he’d felt his heart seize and his stomach flip. He didn’t even have a chance to protest, as his noncom had turned back to the fight.

He and Cajé were headed to the little cottage that the squad had passed earlier in the mission. *Damn Krauts, damn war. Seven replacements this week, Kirby shot in the arm Cajé bleeding from a bullet to his side, and Hanley back at the CP demanding something we can’t give him.*

Cajé’s arm chafed his neck and he struggled to stay upright with each step. His breathing came in great gasps as the weight of the wounded soldier tried to pull him down.

His knees ached and excruciating pain shot up and down his spine. *I hope and pray that stupid place is up ahead. I’ve gotta be close, the area looks familiar.*

He finally spotted the cottage through the trees, closed his eyes and sighed in relief. He sat Cajé against a tree and checked the seeping bandage.

“I’ll be right back Cajé. I wanna make sure the coast is clear before we go charging in there. I’ll change that bandage when we get settled.” Cajé’s head bobbed up and then his chin fell to his chest.

He carefully made his way to the quiet building. Of course, that didn’t mean anything. He wasn’t going to take any chances though, and flattened against the wall to look in the window. He moved over to the door and opened it cautiously. Moving into the sunlit room, he looked in every corner.

The inside of the cottage looked like every small house that they’d come across lately. There was one large room with a fire place on one wall, with rocking chairs and a bench surrounding it. The table was set for dinner but the surrounding chairs were shoved away like the family had left in a hurry. A hutch sat against the wall, which were bare.

He pulled back a tattered curtain that hung in a doorway. There was a small bed, an end table with a hurricane lamp on it and a chair. Satisfied that all was clear he went and got his charge.

Doc brought Cajé in and laid him down on the bed. He changed the bandage, gave him a shot of morphine and helped the PFC drink from his canteen. He pulled the chair closer to the bed, removed his helmet and sat down, running his hand through his sweaty hair. He adjusted the blanket on Cajé and sat back. Glancing around the tiny alcove of a room, he stretched and got comfortable.

He turned his head to listen for the distant battle that raged. Worry settled like writhing snakes in his belly. He needed to be with his squad but also here with Cajé. He looked at the GI who lay on the bed, pale and feverish.

In the peace and quiet of the lonely little cottage, Doc's mind wandered. He felt so out of place here. This place had been owned by someone who had painstakingly built it and furnished it for their family. They were probably dead or forced out, by one side or the other.

"Not fair," he muttered. Anger seethed in his very being as Cajé moaned in pain.

"We shouldn't be here," he said under his breath. "This is wrong." He wiped his hand over his face and shook his head. "Damn Krauts, damn war." He hated repeating himself, but that was all that he could think at the moment. He was physically tired, his head hurt, he needed a hot shower, and he was emotionally exhausted.

He let his chin drop to his chest, intertwined his fingers, crossed his ankles, and fell into a light sleep.

He hadn't dozed long when he heard soft voices outside. He hoped it was Sarge and the guys, but this close to the battle he wasn't sure. He put his hand on Cajé's shoulder and saw that he was unconscious, no need to warn him to be quiet.

Doc moved to the dirty window and looked out through the thread-bare curtains. He saw two German soldiers stepping out of the tree line. The smaller one struggled to stay on his feet as he half dragged his injured compatriot. The injured man had a large dark stain in his midsection, and a red medic's cross on his dangling arm. He was doing his best to relieve the pressure he was putting on his partner but was failing miserably.

Doc watched the two men approach, unsure of his feelings at the moment. Should he open the door and help or should he grab Cajé's M-1 and start firing? He rested his head against the wall as his heart won the battle. An injured man was an injured man no matter what clothes he wore. He sighed, stepped over to the door and stood in the opening.

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The smaller soldier looked up when he heard the noise and froze. He focused on the American standing in the doorway. The wounded medic squeezed his shoulder and nodded at the man's arm. The American glanced at his bicep and touched the red cross to assure the soldier he meant him no harm.

<"It will be okay,"> the wounded medic reassured him. <"He is a medic like me, he won't hurt you.">

<"You don't know that,"> the young one said. <"He is an American and a blemish that needs to be erased.">

<"Oh, Emeric, there is so much you need to learn.">

The two men moved toward the cottage.

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When Doc saw them continue, he went back inside and swept his arm over the table sending plates, utensils, and cups clattering to the floor.

The two soldiers stood in the doorway, the young one staring intently at the wounded man in GI garb lying on the cot. Anger crawled through the young features, he felt betrayed.

<“I knew I shouldn’t have trusted him,”> Emeric muttered under his breath. <“This is a trap, I just know it.”>

The German medic only shook his head. <“Emeric, he’s no danger to us. He’s wounded too.”>

Doc slapped the table top with his hand. The young man cast a leery gaze as his charge began to lose consciousness. Doc slapped it again for emphasis as he saw the German medic pale even more than when he’d first seen them in the courtyard.

“You’d better hurry,” Doc said, even though he knew the man may not understand English. When the young man didn’t move from his spot in the doorway, Doc walked over and grabbed the German medic’s other arm and forced the issue. He pulled the injured man away from the soldier, sat him gently on the edge of the table and laid him back.

Doc pulled the jacket away from the wound. The German medic’s blood was oozing out of a hole in his right side. Doc rolled him to see if it was a through and through. No such luck. He made eye contact with the man whose pain was evident on his face. He gently palpated the area around the wound. The man bit down and hissed through his teeth.

Doc went over to his rucksack and while his back was turned, he heard a round being chambered up. He straightened slowly, raising his hands, the rucksack dangling loosely. He turned and pointed at the red cross on his medical bag. The boy lowered his rifle and nodded his understanding.

Doc moved over to the German medic and tore open a sulfa pack sprinkling it liberally over the wound. He pulled a bandage out and placed it over the seeping injury pressing down. The man on the table closed his eyes and gave a small cry as the pressure was applied. “Sorry,” Doc apologized. The man opened his eyes and nodded.

The younger man stepped to the table dragging his rifle by the barrel. His eyes were terrified and vacant. Tears threatened. He propped the rifle against the table as the medic raised his hand. The boy took it and pulled it to his chest.

<“Emeric, you are so very strong, and I am proud to call you brother, but”> the man said. <“you are too young to be in this business of war, Eric, go home, grow up some more, make mother a proud grandmother.”>

Doc looked at the boy across from him. His face was covered with dirt, sweat, and blood. He looked like he had just come in from playing roughly outside rather than a battlefield. The uniform was a size too large and didn’t fit. He must be one of the Hitler Youth that he’d heard about. He had to be about thirteen or fourteen. Doc shook his head. He’d heard that the Hitler Youth were supposed to be the epitome of the perfect soldier. It was sad to think any child had to be taught how to be the perfect soldier.

He reached into his rucksack and retrieved a surette of morphine. The young boy looked at him, placing his hand on the barrel of his Schmeisser, still unsure of his feelings toward an American soldier.

"Morphine," Doc explained as he injected the medication into the injured man's thigh.

<"Its okay Emeric, he is doing the right thing for me."> The medic looked at Doc and nodded, "Danke shoen."

Doc nodded back, "Bitte."

He looked into the blue eyes of the medic, and then at the young boy across the table from him. The family resemblance was uncanny, these two were brothers. Cajé moaned from the little room and Doc went to check on him.

<"You did well today, Eric, Father will be so very proud of you.">

<"But not good enough, Werner,"> the boy lowered his head and began to sob softly, <"I didn't protect you.">

<"That was not your job,"> Werner's pain overwhelmed him and he groaned. Emeric knelt beside the table. <"Tell momma that I love her."> Werner said as the pain passed.

<"You tell her when you get home,"> Emeric replied, as he laid his head on Werner's shoulder.

<"I do not think I will be making it home,"> Werner coughed, and blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

Emeric looked up at his elder brother. The tears that threatened earlier coursed trails through the grime on his face. "Nein," he sobbed. Werner brought his hand up and touched the back of the boy's head. "Nein," Emeric whispered, and laid his head down on the shoulder, crying into it.

<"You are the best brother a guy could ever have,"> Werner coughed again, as the fluid began to fill his lungs.

Doc moved over quickly as the familiar 'death rattle' sounded. He felt for the carotid artery. The beat beneath his fingers was slowing to a stop, so he lowered his head and said a small silent prayer as he did for all the soldiers he treated.

Emeric looked up expectantly at Doc. The American could only shake his head no. He reached up and closed the blue lifeless eyes. The boy lowered his head and cried softly into the shoulder of his older brother.

"Doc! Look out!" Cajé yelled from the alcove. Doc hurried over to soothe the panicked PFC.

"It's okay, Cajé, we're safe," he felt for the pulse in the Cajun's wrist. "Here, Cajé," he pulled his canteen from his hip and removed the cap, lifting it to the wounded soldiers dry, cracked lips. Cajé raised his head and sipped carefully from the offered drink. Settling back to the pillow, he could only nod his appreciation.

Doc heard a noise behind him and turned. The young boy had stood up, grabbed his Schmeisser and was coming around the table. Doc faced the young man and watched as he raised the lethal weapon up to his shoulder, sighting down the barrel.

"No," Doc's eyes grew wide in fear. The boy stepped closer and Doc stood up. "Nein, nicht" Doc said forcefully.

<"He's the one who killed my brother!"> Emeric screamed at the medic.

"I don't understand," Doc stood in front of the barrel, blocking a clear shot at Cajé.

The boy focused on the crazy man standing in front of his weapon. His eyes filled with grief, his face tense with anger and hatred. > "I can kill you, both," < the boy said as new tears coursed down his dirty face.

What was that phrase that Brockmeyer tried to teach him? He wracked his brain, "Shprec ..." damn his fried brain. He could hear Brockmeyer speaking in his head; he closed his eyes and listened, "Shpreck-uh neekt Doytch."

The boy's grip tightened on the Schmeisser, and he rested his dirty cheek on the stock. Doc took a step closer. "Don't do this," he pleaded.

<"He killed my brother." >

Doc saw the trigger finger tighten and in one swift move he grabbed the barrel and pointed it toward the ceiling as it went off. He twisted the Schmeisser from the boy's hands. He grabbed the boy around the neck and held him tight. He didn't struggle, just seemed to collapse against Doc's strong hold.

He sobbed into the American's chest. Doc lowered the Schmeisser to the ground and let the child cry, loosening his grip. Doc moved him over to a chair next to the table and sat him down. He handed him his canteen and indicated he wanted him to drink. The boy drank thirstily from the tin receptacle.

"Danke," the boy said, handing back the container, and ran the back of his arm across his mouth.

"Bitte," Doc replied, returning the canteen to his hip.

<"I must go."> Emeric stood and picked the Schmeisser up from the floor. Doc moved quickly in front of the boy, placing a hand on the weapon. Emeric shook his head and turned to leave.

"I'm sorry," Doc said to the boy's back. Emeric turned and looked over his shoulder. There was a lost look in his eyes as he hesitantly raised his hand, and left the little cottage. Doc found himself saying another small prayer for a boy walking back toward a battlefield he had no business being in.

"Nothing but a boy," Doc whispered as he watched Emeric's back disappearing into the trees.

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Emeric walked toward the tree line in a state of shock. He'd witnessed the murder of his brother and he was having serious doubts about everything that he had been taught. The American medic wasn't the demon that he'd been told they were. At one point it looked as if the American was praying. Father had said that they were wicked and evil. This one tried to save Werner. He was so confused. The world didn't make sense any more.

A noise startled him and brought him to the present. He stopped and raised his rifle.

The young man that stood in front of him in an American GI's uniform didn't look much older than Werner. Both hesitated for a fraction of a second, stunned at the vision that had presented itself.

"Hande hock," Billy shouted.

Emeric's finger tightened on the trigger and fired.

The first bullet slammed into a tree beside the private, the second found Billy's shoulder. Nelson didn't hesitate and returned fire, hitting the boy in the ill-fitting uniform in the chest.

Emeric's eyes went wide as he grabbed at his wound and fell backwards. He felt his blood gushing through the hole in his chest. "Momma?" he whispered.

Within seconds, Billy was at Emeric's side, "Hold still," Billy comforted. "Sarge!"

Saunders and what remained of his squad crashed through the brush to stand over the two men.

"Littlejohn, Kirby, check the perimeter, make sure it's safe," Saunders ordered. The two men nodded and left. Saunders looked toward the cottage and saw Doc standing in the doorway. He stepped into the clearing, "DOC!" he yelled, waving his arm. The medic disappeared into the cottage to get his rucksack and came running.

"Sarge, he can't be much older than fourteen," Nelson commented.

"He's Hitler Jugend," Brockmeyer told them, "Hitler Youth."

Doc skidded to a halt at Emeric's head. The boy looked up at him, pleading with his eyes to help. Doc knelt down and ripped open the shirt, then checked for an exit wound in his back. The boy was bleeding to death and there was nothing he could do. Doc placed a hand on his shoulder. "Go find your brother," Doc whispered to him.

Brockmeyer translated the sentence. The boy nodded and said, "Danke."

"Bitte" Doc replied. The silence among the trees was like a chapel. Doc reached for the boy's hand and held it as Emeric's blue eyes went dim.

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After returning to the CP and delivering Caje to the doctors in the aid tent, Doc wandered off into the trees to be alone. He had to think. He had to be alone.

It was easier to be angry at the Kra ... no the Germans. It was because of them that they were here. But he was just a boy, only on this planet thirteen or fourteen years. Not enough time to have his first beer, get a girlfriend, or get married and have children, to experience life, not enough time. It was so very unfair.

His eyes stung with unshed tears. "So many ..." He whispered to himself. He jumped as a hand touched his shoulder. Wiping his eyes he turned to see his Sergeant standing over him.

"It's okay, Doc," Saunders sat next to his medic, leaning back against the same tree. Doc nodded and stared at his outstretched legs.

"He was just a boy, Sarge."

"They all are, Doc."

"He brought his brother to me and I couldn't save him."

"You can't save them all," Saunders pulled a Lucky Strike from his pocket and lit it.

"I've learned a lot of things, since I got here, Sarge, but this last lesson was an eye opener." He inhaled deeply and looked up through the leaves of the tree to the bright blue sky. "My Gramma always quoted the Bible scripture, 'Judge not, lest ye be judged.' I could never understand that phrase, but I do now." He folded his hands in his lap. "Be careful what you think. You never know what's behind the action of the other person." He shook his head, "When I saw the boy and his brother in the trees coming for the cottage, I hated him because of the uniform he wore." He dropped his chin to his chest, "I debated getting Cajé's M-1 and something stopped me." He rubbed his hands on his thighs, "Sarge, that boy wanted to kill Cajé because of the uniform he wore." He sighed, "I saw me in him at that moment and I didn't like what I saw."

The two men sat in silence, both lost in memories best forgotten.

"I'm gonna get some coffee. You comin'?" Saunders asked.

"No, I need to be alone for a little while," Doc replied.

"Okay." Saunders stood and tossed his cigarette.

Doc nodded. Saunders patted his shoulder and walked back to camp.

"Thanks, Sarge," Doc said blinking through the dampness stinging his eyes. Saunders waved his hand in acknowledgment, but didn't look back as he walked away.

The End