

## Reinette

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The little eyes were brimmed with tears of worry; Monique had hidden under the bed when the Boshe had entered the tiny apartment two days ago, killing her father and wounding her mother. Despite her mother's assurances that she would be alright, Monique fretted, for each time she stroked her mother's face it was hotter than the last.

Monique heard distant gunfire outside and she quickly shut the door. She climbed back onto the bed and her mother gave her an encouraging smile before she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

The girl looked at the little rag doll that lay beside her Mother. It was something her father had made to comfort her when the war had begun. That moment danced in her head ...

*She squealed her delight and held the doll up. "Reinette" the child announced, dancing and skipping around the room.*

*Her father smiled at the sweetness in the moment and admonished Monique to always keep Reinette close; she reassured him that she would never lose sight of her new best friend.*

His face faded from view and her focus returned to her sick mother.

She whispered something into Reinette's ear. With a submissive sigh she slipped off the bed, pulled the little doll into her arm and cradled it close. She looked once more at her fevered mother and then left the apartment.

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"Stay here," Saunders ordered.

As the sergeant disappeared around the corner, Doc leaned against the building and closed his eyes. So far, the mission had gone well. There'd been only sporadic gunfire outside of the little village, but first squad had made short work of chasing off the small group of soldiers and it looked like this place would make a good CP for the lieutenant. The medic lowered his chin to his chest. He breathed deep, exhaling slowly, letting his body relax. An insistent tug on his jacket made him flinch and he suddenly gazed down into the face of a determined little girl. He guessed her age to be about six. Her dark hair was disheveled. Her face was smudged with dirt. And she held a small rag doll close to her heart. Her brown eyes clouded with unshed tears.

She stepped back, but the purpose in getting the American's attention prevented her from running.

Doc placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Hi, sweetheart." He patted his pocket as he squatted down to look her in the eye. He found what he'd been looking for. "Chocolate?" He held it out to her.

She looked from the offered candy to Doc's blue eyes. Instead of grabbing the candy, she grabbed his free hand and pulled, almost knocking him off his feet.

"Whoa," he said, standing up. "What's wrong?" She pulled again, this time more insistent when he stopped. The girl tugged on his hand. "Okay, I'll follow."

She led the American medic through the deserted streets and alleys, her small hand never leaving his. At each intersection she would speak to the little doll clutched to her chest. Arriving at a partially demolished apartment building, she let go of Doc's hand long enough to open the door. She led him down a dark hallway.

"Momma?" She raced through the front room to a bedroom in the back. Doc followed close. He watched her climb up on a bed next to a woman and began to stroke her hair. The woman's eyes opened.

>"Where did you go, Monique?"<

>"Momma, I brought an American."<

>"I told you I would be okay ... you know it is dangerous outside."<



>“But, Momma, you got so hot and I got scared.”<

The woman’s fever-brightened eyes apprehensively took in the medic’s appearance.  
“Parlez-vous Français?”

“No,” Doc responded, touching her forehead. “Where are you hurt?” The woman and the little girl stared at him. “Injured?”

The little girl pulled the blanket away from her mother’s leg. A ragged make-shift bandage was tied to it. Doc knelt down beside the bed, removed the bandage and checked to see if it was a ‘through and through’. Upon further examination, infection oozed from the bullet hole and the flesh around the wound was swollen and inflamed. He pulled his canteen from his hip and poured clean water over it. The mother hissed as he felt for a bullet.

Doc looked at Monique. “Where is your father?” The little girl stared at him. “Papa?”

>“Papa is dead.” < The little girl’s big brown eyes filled with tears and she buried her face in her mother’s shoulder. The mother spoke soothing words of comfort to her daughter.

The medic sprinkled sulfa over the hole and wrapped a clean bandage around it. He stood and helped the weak woman sip from his canteen.

She laid her head back. “Merci.”

There was a noise in the hallway and Doc hid behind the door. He watched the little girl slip off the side of the bed, and her mother close her eyes to feign death.

The crunching sound of approaching footsteps caused the medic to hold his breath. Hands braced flat against the door, ready to slam it if need be, Doc suddenly let his breath out in grateful relief as he recognized the muzzle of Kirby’s BAR.

“Caje!” Kirby called out, “we have a dead one in here.”

The little girl popped her head up on the opposite side of the bed and Doc spoke behind him. “We need to get her to battalion aid.”

Kirby jumped and placed his hand over his heart.

“Doc, you just scared the bejeebers outta me.” Kirby shook his head. “I thought you were with Sarge. What are you doing here?”

“Monique brought me.” He stepped over to the bed, nodding at Caje as he entered the room.

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When Company arrived and got set up, the medics moved the woman and her daughter to the temporary aid station to await the truck back to the battalion hospital.

“Saunders,” Hanley called from the doorway of the abandoned mayor’s office.

“Yes, sir?”

“I need to see you.”

The lieutenant looked down at his map as Saunders entered the small room, removed his helmet, tucked it under his arm and approached the table.

“What’s up, Lieutenant?”

Hanley put his long hands on either side of the map. “Intel tells us there are German’s moving in on our position here,” he pointed at a place on the map. “I need your squad to get in there and tell us where they’re at and their strength.” He pulled a field map from the top of a stack of papers, and handed it over to his sergeant, who glanced at it, folded it, and put it in his jacket. “Avoid contact, if possible.”

“Yes sir,” Saunders turned, replaced his helmet and headed out the door.

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Saunders’ squad had temporarily bivouacked in the church, each member grabbing any upright pew to use as a cot.

Doc stared up at the vaulted ceiling thinking, no praying, for Monique and her mother. He heard movement at the door and sat up. Saunders had entered and he didn't look happy.

"Off and on men," he ordered.

"Do we have ta, Sarge?" Kirby's groans were heard over everyone else's echoing around the building.

"Those are the orders. The lieutenant wants us to scout up ahead. Says there are some German's trying to find us."

"Aww," Kirby lay back a little harder than he wanted and thumped his head on the hard wood. "Ow."

"See what happens when you argue in God's house, Kirby?" Littlejohn snickered as he gathered his gear.

Kirby glared at the big man, rubbing the back of his head.

The men assembled around their Sergeant. "We need to avoid contact. Cajé, point. Kirby, you bring up the rear. Everyone else, fall in between."

As they exited the church, Monique ran up to Doc and wrapped her arms around his waist. She held her doll up and spoke adamantly. He stepped out of line and knelt down. The squad gathered around.

"What's she saying Cajé?" Doc asked, wiping the tears from her little cheeks with his thumbs.

"She wants you to take Reinette, that you need her more than she does. She says that she'll protect you."

"Who's Reinette?" Kirby stepped up behind them.

"No one goes with us," Saunders said.

Monique looked up at him with pleading brown eyes. >"Please take Reinette! She warns that there is trouble ahead for you."< The more she tried to convince Saunders to take the small item with them the more anxious she became.

"Sarge, she says that there is trouble waiting for us," Cajé explained as he tried to calm the girl.

"I'm sorry sweetheart, no one goes with us. She needs to stay here with you."

>"She doesn't take up much space."< She held the rag doll at arm's length. > "See, she won't get in the way and she's light as a feather."< She bounced the little doll up and down to prove her point.

"She insists that Reinette won't be a bother."

"Monique," Doc turned her toward him, "We can't take your baby with us," he said with a smile. She thrust the doll into his open hand. He looked at the toy. "She would be so lost without you." He stroked the thread-bare hair and looked into the faded eyes, which had been so artfully drawn some time ago. There was something about those eyes that he couldn't shake; something unique and special.

Doc shook his head to clear it. "She needs to stay with her mommy. Besides," he handed the doll back, "she's too pretty to go where we're going."

Monique hugged Reinette to her chest.

Cajé put a hand on her shoulder. >"Tell Reinette, thank you for her concern but we will be okay. She does not need to go with us."<

> "But ..."<

Saunders interrupted her. "We need to get going Cajé. Tell her ... "



Caje nodded at the unspoken command, turned the child's attention away from Doc and began to stress to her in no uncertain terms that she wasn't to follow.

As Doc stood to get in line, Monique grabbed around his waist and sobbed into his jacket. He didn't know what else to do but pat her back.

Caje reassured her that they would be fine.

Saunders gestured at Kirby, *'take point,'* he mouthed. Kirby nodded and while the squad filed out, Doc pried the little girl's arms from him. As he hurried to catch up to the squad, the sound of her cries followed him all the way across the bridge.

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Thirty minutes into their mission Kirby signaled for an all stop. Everyone scattered to a hiding place close by as he moved back to make his report.

"There are about seven of them heading this direction."

Saunders rubbed his chin. "Nelson, Littlejohn find cover on the left side. Remember, no contact. Don't fire unless I do." Both men nodded and went to conceal themselves in the dense brush that lined the dirt road. Letting them get into position, he turned to his trusted B.A.R. man and scout. "I want you two farther up the road from here. If there's trouble, your aim Caje, and the BAR will come in handy. We'll have them trapped between us. Find a good clear spot to view the road to our position. Same instructions, nothing until you hear me or you see we've been discovered." They moved off to their place in the line. "Okay Doc, let's go get set." Saunders led him to a place just down from Littlejohn and Billy's.



As Doc lay on his belly, his mind began to 'rifle' through the inventory in his rucksack. He was satisfied that he was prepared for just about anything. He watched the road and waited. After a while, he glimpsed at his watch. Fifteen minutes had passed. Doc glanced over at Saunders who was looking up from his own timepiece. Saunders shrugged his shoulders and picked up his Thompson, gesturing for Doc to follow.

The two men worked their way through the underbrush and trees. Saunders did a quick whistle to signal for Caje. Caje returned the whistle and the four men met together.

"Thought you said they were headed our way."

"They were. I don't know what the holdup is." Kirby replied in his defense.

"Show me," Saunders pointed toward the road. "Doc, run over and let Littlejohn and Nelson know what's going on, and then you and Caje stay here until we get back."

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"They were right there, Sarge I swear." Kirby announced.

The silence was almost deafening as the two soldiers approached. They found discarded, half-eaten German rations and still lit cigarette butts.

"Honest..." Kirby was dumbfounded, and suddenly got a chill up his spine.

Saunders saw the shiver and tried to ignore his own sensation of unease.

"This isn't right," Kirby echoed Saunders suspicion. He sniffed the air, "you smell that, Sarge?" he took a deeper breath. "Smells sweet, like candy."

Saunders sniffed and nodded.

"Must have left in an awful hurry," Kirby commented as he kicked at a half eaten piece of bread.

"Careful Kirby, they don't call them booby traps for nothing," Saunders cautioned.

Kirby's eyes went wide. "Oh yeah," and he stepped back. "Wonder what scared 'em off?"

"I don't know, but something sure did," Saunders rationalized as he scanned the trees that surrounded them. "Let's check it out before going back. We don't need an ambush."

After a short search, finding nothing, they rejoined the others.

"Find anything Kirby?" Nelson asked.

"Yeah, the willies," Kirby replied. Saunders cleared his throat. "What Sarge? You can't tell me a possum didn't walk over your grave too."

"That's enough, Kirby. We're in a battle zone. Let's not make it worse."

"Sorry, Sarge, it was just spooky the way everything was left."

"There are explanations for everything. I'll check with the lieutenant when we get back about other patrols in the area. For now keep your eyes open. Let's move out."

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Monique paced back and forth at the small stone bridge, waiting for the Americans to return. She picked up a pretty pebble, inspected it closely and then tossed it into the dry riverbed. She glanced down the road, saw the one they called Cajé, and took off at a dead run, by passing all others to wrap her arms around the medic.

> "You have returned safely!"<

"What's she saying?" Doc patted Monique's shoulder.

"She's glad we've returned safely," Cajé said.

Monique grabbed Doc's rucksack and reached inside, pulling the little rag doll out, kissing her face and stroking her hair.

"Hey," Doc exclaimed, "how'd that get in there?"

She spoke softly to the little doll as if she was having a conversation. She gasped, "No," and then looked at the men.

> "Reinette said you were in terrible trouble and she sent the men away."<

Cajé turned a curious eye to his fellow squad mates. "She just said that we were in terrible danger."

"How could she ..." Nelson asked.

"Nelson," Saunders stopped the question before it could be asked. "We were on patrol."

"But Sarge ..."

Saunders cleared his throat.

> "What do you mean by that, Monique?"<  
Cajé asked.

> "Reinette tells me that there were men approaching you and they meant to harm you so she sent them away."<

"She also says that Reinette sent the men away because they meant us harm," Cajé explained, his heart skipping a beat.

> "Where did she send them away to?"<  
Cajé asked uneasily. Having been raised in the Louisiana voodoo culture, he was aware of what she meant.

> "Where she sends all bad people who mean my friends harm."<

Cajé's apprehension to reveal what she'd said showed on his face.



“Okay,” Saunders started walking, “enough chitchat. We need to report our findings to the Lieutenant. Let’s go.” The squad continued their trek back to the little church while Saunders peeled away to Hanley’s office.

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“First off, are there other patrols in the area?”

“Not where I sent you,” Hanley replied. “Why?”

“Well, Kirby spotted a squad of Germans headed our direction and when we went to check it out they were gone. I thought maybe another squad had come in contact with them.”

“No, I’ve sent Mac and Joseph’s squads to the east and south of where I sent you.”

“Well, we searched for another couple of hours Lieutenant, and found nothing.”

“I’ll radio back and let them know. I’ll wait for Mac and Joseph’s reports. You and your men get some rest.” Saunders turned and left the office.

Monique watched the sergeant leave the building and followed him at a distance. Reinette was the reason for his return and nothing else. She had to make him believe her.

Saunders knew she was there but didn’t acknowledge her presence. When he entered through the big doors of the church the soft sounds of sleep entered his ears. He found an empty pew toward the back, put his Thompson down, and then removed his web belt and helmet. He ran his hand through his sweaty hair and lay down, propping his feet up on the arm of the pew. The gentle sounds of slumber settled his jangled nerves and he closed his eyes.

A new sound floated through his sleep deprived brain. *Damn*, he recognized the slow footsteps as they moved over the floor. They didn’t sound like boots. *Who dares* ... the steps stopped at his shoulder. He opened his eyes to the little disheveled child, her rag doll pulled close to her chest. He sat up and looked at her. “Hello, sweetie,” he whispered, patting his pocket. “Would you like some gum?” He held a stick out to her. Her focus never left his eyes.

> “You don’t believe.”<

“I’m sorry, I don’t speak French. Uh, no *parlez-vous français*. Why don’t you go and check on your mommy? I’ll bet she needs you more than we do.”

> “Pappa didn’t believe either.”< She looked down at her doll.

Saunders sighed leaning on his knees. “Caje.”

“Yea, Sarge?” the Cajun said a few rows up.

“I need a translator.”

Caje sat up and looked over the pew. He smiled when he saw Monique. > “Monique, what do you need?”< She turned to look at him. They spoke for a few minutes and then Caje turned to Saunders.

“She says Reinette is upset that you don’t believe that she sent the bad men away,” Caje explained.

Saunders ran his hand through his hair again and stared at the little girl. “Something sent those men a different direction, but I’m not going to admit that it was a doll that did it.”

“I can’t tell her that, Sarge.”

“Well then,” Saunders observed the little girls’ face, “tell her I believe so that we can get some rest.”

> “Monique, Sarge says he believes that Reinette sent those men away.”<

She turned back to Saunders and examined his face. >“Reinette says it is a lie. He only wants us to go away.”<

Saunders sat up straight when he saw Caje’s mouth drop open.

“What?”

“She just said you lied to get her to go away.”

Saunders grinned, “Does she speak English?”

>“The Sergent wants to know if you speak English.”<

>“No, but Reinette understands,”< Her eyes never waivered. > “She wants to prove she sent those men away.”<

> “Monique,”< Cajé tried to reason with her, > “you are the only one that needs to believe, not us.”<

> “She will prove it!”< Monique turned and left the church. Saunders shook his head and lay back down on the pew.

The men had gotten only an hours’ worth of sleep when the Lieutenant’s new runner entered the church. “Sergeant Saunders,” he called from the doorway.

“Yeah.” Like the other men, Saunders sat up, gazing in annoyance at the runner.

“The Lieutenant needs to see you. NOW.” The runner left the church. Saunders stretched and rose slowly. The need for more sleep pulled at him as he left the serene surroundings of the church.

“Mac’s squad hasn’t reported back yet.”

“What direction where were they headed?” Saunders asked with an edge of worry as he stepped up to the table.

“To the east of where I sent you. Here, along this ridge.” Hanley lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply.

“Take a radio this time.”

“Yes sir,” he hurried off to collect his men.

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Nelson walked up the line to Saunders. “Sarge,” he whispered.

“Yeah?”

“Someone is following us.”

Saunders called for an all stop and gathered his men around him.

“What direction?” Saunders asked the young private.

“To the west of us, on the right side.”

Saunders signaled Cajé to move on ahead and swing around, then nodded and pointed for the others to stay put. He retraced their path and swung around behind whoever was trailing them. He moved through the brush as quiet as a mouse; Cajé was a few yards away and he saw him shrug, shaking his head ‘no’. They met up and rejoined the others.

“What did you find, Sarge?” Nelson asked.

“Nothing. Your ears must be playing tricks on you,” Saunders replied. There was a soft giggle from the brush. The men turned and Monique stepped forward.

> “That was a fun game of hide and seek, Sergeant,”< Monique snickered.

He took a deep breath to control his rising anger. “Cajé ask her what she’s doing out here?”

Monique looked down at her doll as Cajé spoke with her. She shook her head and then responded.

> “We told the Sergent back at the church that we would prove she protected you, and we just did.”< She grinned.

> “What do you mean, ‘you just did?’”< Cajé asked.

> “You could not find us just now.”<

> “That’s because we weren’t looking for you; we were looking for the Boshe.”<

> “Ah, but we were only standing in the brush. The Sergent went past me three times and did not see me.”<

Cajé translated their conversation.

“We don’t need this, Cajé.” Saunders was angry that the child had taken it upon herself to follow them. “We can’t be concerned with her safety as well as our own. Send her home, immediately.”

Caje relayed Saunders' orders to Monique.

"To have the faith of a little child," Nelson whispered.

"It's only 'cause you're still a kid yourself," Kirby snickered.

"Give it a rest, Kirby," Nelson commented. "Think about it. If she thinks she can't be seen then maybe she can't." Kirby gave him a deadpan look. "Camouflage is the same theory, only we use 'things' to make us blend in. She just believes she can't be seen and she becomes 'invisible', sorta ..."

"An' you're telling me to give it a rest? Boy, is that the pot calling the kettle black."

"It's only a thought," Nelson said.

"I see what Billy means," Doc chimed in. "I used to play peek-a-boo with my sister when she was a baby. She'd cover her head with a towel and as long as I played along with her, she was invisible. Or at least thought she was and as long as she thought she was, you know, invisible, she was happy."

"Caje tell her to go home!" Saunders grew increasingly uneasy. They were standing in the open discussing child games. He reached into his jacket, pulled the map free and examined it. He semi listened to the French being spoken between Monique and Caje. He shook his head and looked ahead at the open field and brush bordering it. *Where are you, Mac?* he muttered more to himself than anyone around him. There was a tug on his jacket and he looked down into Monique's eyes; Saunders didn't need this distraction.

> "Reinette knows where your friend is,"< Monique told him.

Caje gasped.

Saunders looked at his scout.

"What did she say?"

"She said that Reinette knows where Mac is."

Saunders sighed. "We don't have time for this, Caje! Tell her it's not safe and she has to return to her mother."

He waited while Caje translated his order.

> "But she can take you to him,"< Monique explained.

> "Monique it is not safe here! You need to go back to your mother."<

> "But, I thought you wanted to find your friends?"<

> "We will find our friends. We know which way they went. We will follow their path."<

She held Reinette up to her ear. > "The Boshe do not have them. They are headed back to the village."<

Caje sighed and shook his head. No matter how hard he tried he couldn't get through to her.

> "She says one of them is limping."< She looked out to the open field and started walking at a brisk pace.

"Caje, go get her," Saunders was so aggravated that the child wasn't listening to him that he was about to lose his cool and treat her like he did one of his men.

Caje brought the child back by the hand. "She says that Mac's squad is headed back to the village and that one of them is limping."

> "They need your help. Reinette says the Boshe are very close to them. You need to hurry."<

Saunders couldn't believe his eyes. If, and that was a big if, what the child was telling them was true she was walking right into the mouth of hell. She couldn't know what she knew. There was no way.

"What do we do, Sarge?" Nelson asked. "Do we follow her or do we go the way we've been going?"

"We can't very well let her walk around a battle ground by herself, now can we?"

Saunders sighed. "This is against my better judgment, but we follow her. If she's right, then we find Mac and his squad, and if she's wrong at least we can keep an eye on her."

Caje let go of her hand and she headed across the field.

"Everyone, eyes open. Caje, get up there with her. Kirby you watch our backs. Littlejohn five paces to our right, Nelson, five paces to our left. Doc, you here with me."

They crossed the field without incident and worked their way into the brush. Monique seemed to know exactly which way to go. The men followed close behind her keeping a vigilant eye toward danger.

She stopped in her tracks. > "The Boshe are close."< She whispered to Caje, and he signaled an all stop.

Saunders joined the scout. "What's wrong?"

"She says the Krauts are close." Caje's sharp eye spotted nothing. "I don't see anything."

"Go check the area up ahead and then report back," Saunders told him. Caje nodded and disappeared into the brush.

Monique sat quietly, occasionally whispering into the doll's ear until Caje returned a few moments later.

"She's right, they're up there. Heading this way."

"Did you see Mac and his men?"

"No, I didn't see them any where," Caje replied.

"Okay, you, Kirby, Nelson and Littlejohn work your way around that way. Doc, Monique and I will wait here." Caje nodded and Saunders watched his men take off.

>"Where are they going?"< Monique asked as she peeked up over the weeds.

"Don't worry they'll be fine. Shhhh," he put his finger to his mouth.

>"Pappa didn't have Reinette, that's why he died. I don't want you to die too."< Tears began in her eyes.

Saunders never wished for Caje's ability to understand the French language so hard.

> "Reinette says they are coming, be quiet."<

"What?" Doc asked.

"Shhhh ..." she put her finger to her lips.

Five Germans came into view.

Doc pulled Monique to her belly and covered her. She opened her mouth to speak and Saunders put his finger to his lips, stressing the point to her. He gave Doc a hard look to indicate, 'keep her quiet!' before moving away.

Monique shook her head and was about to say something when Doc covered her mouth. He leaned into her ear and whispered ... "shhh."

The medic watched as the enemy soldiers walked right past them not even giving them a second glance. *How could they have not seen us?* Doc heard the German sergeant say something and the men sat down not far from where he and Monique hid. His heart skipped several beats. He felt Monique shift at his side and he looked at her. She was whispering to the doll. Or was the doll whispering to her? His stress level was at an all time high and he was thinking things that shouldn't be thought. The doll was a play-thing, not a real person. He kept his focus on the German's that sat in front of him.

The muscles in his arms began to twitch and his fingers were feeling numb from leaning on his elbows. He tried not to hold his breath, to breathe slow and easy, but that wasn't working. He took a slow deep breath through his nose and released it just as slow. He needed



to get himself under control. He'd been in tenuous situations before, why was this one different? He knew Saunders and the others had his back that he shouldn't worry. It had to be the addition of the little girl Monique. He didn't want any harm to come to the child.

Doc felt her wiggle beside him. Suddenly, before he could stop her, she rose. The air was alive with an outburst from the surrounding soldiers as they all saw the girl dart into the brush. The next thing Doc knew, he was staring into the eyes of a German sergeant. Climbing to his feet, Doc felt something soft beneath his hands; Reinette's eyes, fixed and ornamental, seemed to look right at him. His breath caught at the unreality of the moment. And then gunfire erupted all around.

All of a sudden silence touched his ears. It was over as quickly as it began. Something was terribly wrong. He could smell the gunpowder and fresh spilt blood. And something else that he couldn't quite place.

"DOC!"

He dropped Reinette and ran toward the call. As he approached his squad he took assessment of each one. Kirby's wrist was propped over his BAR and blood was seeping through the upper part of his sleeve. Nelson and Littlejohn stood beside him apparently unharmed. Saunders and Cajé were kneeling on the ground beside Monique.

"No," he muttered and ran to her. His quick evaluation told him everything he needed to know. He didn't need to check her carotid artery but it was an automatic movement that proved what he already knew. He bowed his head and brought his hand away touching something as he moved it. Reinette lay on the little girl's chest, over her heart. Doc straightened and looked over his shoulder. He knew he'd left the little doll in the weeds. When he looked back at the small toy, it appeared to have tears on its cheeks. Doc leaned forward and respectfully picked up the little doll.



"She didn't take Reinette with her ... she left her with me, but I didn't put her here."

"She ran right into the line of fire. I couldn't stop her," Cajé explained, lowering his head. "She saved my life, Sarge."

There was a noise in the brush behind them and all the men trained their weapons toward it.

"Don't shoot!" a familiar voice hollered. The scout for the squad approached first, followed by four others. One supported his sergeant, who was limping; another guarded a German prisoner.

"Hey," Nelson whispered to Kirby, "didn't Monique say something about one guy limping?"

Kirby nodded.

"Mac," Saunders stood. "The lieutenant sent us to look for you."

"We heard the firefight and thought maybe we could lend a hand, but I see you ..." Mac stopped short as his eyes beheld the small child lying on the ground. War was hell, but seeing a child caught in the middle of it was even worse.

The air was heavy with silence as the men gathered around Monique.

"You smell that, Sarge?" Kirby interrupted, glancing around at the trees. "Smells like ... candy."

"I smell roses," Billy commented. Everyone took a deep breath savoring the sweet smell.

The German prisoner stepped back reverently, and said a small prayer in German.

“I smell them too,” the German said with a thick accent. “My mother always told me that when God is near, there is a sweet smell of roses.”

THE END