

The Journey of Jonah Draft

It all started when I failed to graduate from Limberly High School for the second time. I was nineteen and I knew that I was meant for something greater than to stay in the same school for another year of my life. At my age I didn't have a lot of choices and because of my low grades not too many jobs would accept me. I was hopeless, until I found the army.

I remember the tingling sensation I had when I read the job form. The picture of Abe Lincoln pointing at me was a little startling, but besides that it sounded like the perfect job.

"Leave home for six months, food and bedding supplied, little education needed..." I read it over again. This was the perfect opportunity. I quickly filled out the form and biked across town to the small office with the blinking neon sign: ARMY

I sat in a comfortable chair across from a man with obvious battle experience. His face had a scar starting from his left eye to his jaw. He seemed to have trouble speaking.

"So you want to join the army?"

I couldn't tell if that was a question so I answered anyway.

"Yeah."

After a few more minutes of talking I gave him my form he took a quick look at it and slid it into a box.

"A bus will pick you up tomorrow morning at 9 a.m."

"Thank you."

"Goodbye soldier," he said as I walked out the door.

When I returned home I told my parents about the plan. My mother complained but my dad had served so he was happy with the news.

"My son's finally becoming a man," he said.

My mother was the complete opposite and was compelled to ask questions and help me pack. I was able to fit most of my belongings in two suitcases and a backpack. That night I received phone calls from many of my relatives, most of them sounding the same.

“Oh Jonah what will become of you?” Or,

“Jonah Draft are you sure this is what you want to do?”

I would always respond with “I’ll be fine,” or “I’m sure this is what I want.”

The bus came the next morning 20 minutes late. There were three other passengers on the bus including the driver who seemed unwilling to talk from behind his extra dark sunglasses. I took a seat in the back. If I had learned anything in high school it was that you shouldn’t be the first one to talk or introduce yourself. The kid seated in the seat across from me must not have heard this advice because he jumped out of his seat and thrust a hand towards me.

“Hi, I’m Melvin Rovac.” He had red hair and pale skin. Orange freckles peppered his face, centered around a wide grin.

“I’m Jonah.”

The bus ride took 30 minutes to reach the airport. I learned the other passenger’s name was Carl Grender. He and Melven were both a year older than me. Carl joined because he wanted to help his country and Melven couldn’t remember how he joined.

We boarded the plane and soon were 30,000 feet in the air. It would be an 8 hour flight to Egypt and once again we were the only passengers on the plane. I put on a pair of red ear-muffs and leaned back in my seat.

I don’t know how long I was asleep but next thing I knew I was being shaken awake by Melvin.

“Wake up man, wake up.”

I lifted my head and the first thing I thought was *smoke*.

“Smoke.” I tore off my seatbelt. “Melvin?” I shouted. The whole cabin was full of smoke and it was impossible to see. I heard some coughing and the side door opened. A breath of fresh air rushed in my face. Carl was crouching by the emergency exit with a parachute backpack strapped on. He threw a parachute into my arms and shouted something that was barely audible over the roar of the open emergency exit.

“Jump.”

I hurtled myself out the door and tumbled towards the sand. In mid-air I reached to grab the string to activate the parachute and tugged on it. A dark green parachute opened up behind me and my fall stopped abruptly. My body lurched forward at a slower speed. I landed into a sand dune, the impact knocking the air out of me. My parachute landed on top of me. I threw off my parachute and climbed up the dune.

“Carl? Melvin?” I could taste the grains of sand in my mouth. Stumbling on the dune’s slippery sand, I progressed forward.

“Jonah?”

“Carl?”

“The plane’s gone Jonah,” Carl said.

“Where’s Melvin?”

“Here.” A figure waved to us. We plopped down in the sand next to each other.

“Where are we?” I said after a few minutes of sitting in shock. Carl reached into his backpack and pulled out a map.

“Well I’m guessing we’re somewhere in the Sahara Desert.” He used his finger to trace an invisible circle on the map.

Melvin pointed to map.

“Amadeus would be the closest city, about 100 miles north of here. That should take us...” Melvin looked up to do some quick calculations, “two days.”

“Two days!” I exclaimed. “That’s 50 miles a day!”

“How much water do we have?”

“One bottle of water, that’s it.”

“Then let’s get going.”

I found it hard to walk on sand. For every step you take in the sand you seem to fall back two steps, so climbing dunes was extremely difficult. Also, we had a beaming sun right over our heads, so Carl had to put some of his parachute on his head in order to prevent sunburn. Carl was in charge of managing our water supply sparingly and the first time we had a sip of water was after walking for a couple hours and we found a small withered tree providing a little shade. I emptied my shoes and a mountain of sand came rushing out. We couldn’t go barefoot because the heat from the sun had stuck onto the sand, making it a frying pan. We barely spoke. Only after drinking a sip of water did we talk.

“We are not making good time.” Melvin looked the worst out of the three of us.

His pale skin did not go well with this sun and I could already tell he had severe sunburn. Blisters and calluses were forming on my feet. We stayed under the shade of the tree for a few more minutes, then continued walking.

A few hours later the sun was starting to set and we found a small dune to spend the night in. It was nothing to as close as comfortable as a bed but supplied a little shelter. It was still about 80 degrees when we went to sleep, but Carl said to wrap ourselves in our clothes or we would freeze in the night.

I woke up and the sun was just peeking over the dunes. I looked to my right, but what I saw sent a shiver down my spine.

“Carl wake up.” I shook Carl.

“What? What?”

“On Melvin’s back...” Carl looked over and his eyes widened. On top of Melvin’s back lay a two scorpions. One had several smaller baby scorpions on her back and the

other was looking right at us. Melvin was still sleeping, ignorant of what was on his back. Carl whispered into my ear.

“You distract them and I’ll go on the other side of Melvin and try to pull them off. We can’t let Melvin wake up.” I nodded, I understood that Melvin would freak out and startle the scorpions.

Carl sneaked over the dune until he was out of sight. I kept my eyes fixated on the scorpion looking at me. What was I supposed to do? Melvin shuffled in his sleep and the scorpion tensed. How long was Carl taking?

“Carl” I rasped. There was no response. I waited a few more seconds, then saw Carl’s head popped out over the edge of the dune. He crawled down the dune, barely making a sound until he was on the other side of the awake scorpion. As I watched Carl reached his hand out slowly behind the scorpion. The scorpion’s eyes stayed fixed on me. With sudden force Carl grabbed the scorpion’s tail and threw it behind him. The scorpion let out a hiss as it flew through the air. The second scorpion was now awake moving in circles; switching his line of sight between Carl and me. Carl moved in. All of a sudden Melvin eyelid twitched.

“Carl?” Melvin opened his eyes. “What are you doing?”

“Melvin don’t move.”

“Why?”

“Melvin there’s a scorpion on your back.” There was no response for a few seconds.

“A...scorpion?” Melvin’s sunburned face suddenly turned white. He was panicking.

“Melvin stay calm.” I tried to reassure him, but it was too late. Melvin scooted his head over to look at me and the movement startled the scorpion. The scorpion acted in

one quick move, injecting its stinger into Melvin's back. Melvin screamed and rolled on his back squashing the scorpion. Melvin lay on the ground squirming and foaming at the mouth. Then the shaking stopped. Carl rushed to his side and listened for a heart beat.

"He's still alive," Carl said in my direction. Carl lifted Melvin over his shoulder and looked up. Melvin was not very big, but you could see Carl was struggling to carry him. The sun was almost fully above the horizon and I could feel the sweat on my forehead starting to form.

"This way." Carl pointed in a direction towards the sun. And we started our second day of walking.

The sun was in the middle of the sky. How long had we been walking? Three, four hours? Carl was falling behind me. I turned around.

"Carl hurry up." I turned around and continued walking. I checked our water supply, half a bottle left. "Carl?" Silence "Carl?" I spun around to see Carl laying on the ground. "Carl" I stumbled over to him. "What happened?"

"Jonah, water." I twisted off the cap and poured some of our water into his mouth. He gasped a little then sat up.

"I'll take a turn to carry Melvin." Carl nodded. I checked Melvin's pulse, faint. He groaned when I poured the warm water into his mouth.

We took a short break and drank the rest of our water, giving most to Melvin. We had no shade so we couldn't rest for too long.

Carrying Melvin was harder than I had imagined. The thought of leaving him behind kept occurring to me, but I tried to push these thoughts out of my head.

The next time we came to a rest the sun was already in the middle of the sky. Today was hotter than yesterday and already mirages were starting to form. I couldn't see more than one hundred feet in front of me without the ground becoming blurry.

Carl took a turn to carry Melvin, but this time I stayed at his pace. I could see that Carl attempted to talk a couple times, but gave up. I understood. Both our throats were

cracked and we were starved from not eating for the last day and a half. How far was Amadeus? Ten? Twenty miles? Carl looked up and squinted into the distance.

"What?" I asked. He pointed. I followed his finger to a shape 200 meters away. It was a camel. Carl quickened his pace and in his efforts Melvin let out some groans. The camel looked up.

"Wait," I shouted, but it was too late the camel had already galloped off. Carl dropped into the sand.

"Carl we have got to keep going." He smiled and pointed. "Carl the camel is gone." He shook his head and pointed again. I looked and suddenly understood what he was thinking. He wasn't pointing at the camel, he was pointing at what was behind the camel. The vast city of Amadeus stretched across the dessert. I sat down next to Carl. The city looked strange, like it didn't belong here in the vast dessert. It was out of place. I leaned my head back and let out a laugh.

"Hahahahaha" We had made it.