

Moments in Time

Kappa Tau Writing: Book Chapter

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Summary

Liam Blake, a US Marine, returns home to find the war is over, after a near death experience on the battlefield. Liam returns to his wife and newborn son, in hopes of going back to a normal life. But he soon discovers it's hard. Liam begins to pull away from his loved ones, drawing into himself. He's overcome with guilt at the loss of his best friend. He's suffering from flashbacks and is beginning to become violent. Liam then discovers that he is suffering from PTSD, and tries to work through it, and put his family back together. But what happens when the United States is suddenly attacked? What happens when Liam is forced into a new war? How will Liam handle being back on the battlefield? Will he succumb to the desire for his life to end, and become another casualty, or will he conquer his neverending battle?

Bright lights burst upon the starless night sky. The hurting sobs of the wounded resound in my ears as I keep my rapid pace. I don't know what is worse: the cries and ear-splittingly painful shrieks of those fallen, or the aggressive fire and the sound of shells coming apart, tearing pieces out of trees and humans alike. Stopping, I peer out from what, I believe, used to be the wall of a small cottage. My gun hangs at my side, a constant reminder that no matter how good a man is, he can still kill someone he doesn't know for the right to live free.

Ten feet away, I see an all-too familiar face. His gun, unlike mine, is poised and ready for the oncoming fight. He flashes me a small, quick smile before giving me a nod, and then moving out. I follow his crazy antics, and we move together as a team. Another shell explodes behind us, propelling pieces of trees, wedges of buildings, and body parts that strike us viciously. More bellows erupt into the night. We hasten our movements. More artillery detonates over our heads, but we don't halt; we don't hesitate; we fight like hell.

As we reach our designated marks, more enemy soldiers charge forward. I don't waste a second, discharging my gun at the earliest opportunity. I watch the man before me fall, collapsing in a bloody heap onto the cold, compacted dirt. His green eyes cloud with pain and sadness. I stare on as he gasps for air, but make no move to help him. I know I should. It's the Christian thing to do, but I am in a frozen state of mind. Although I'm a soldier and have killed others before, the dreadful feeling in the pit of my stomach never dissipates. This man probably has a wife and kids anxiously awaiting his return. That will never happen now.

Stop thinking like that, I mentally scold myself. You aren't thinking right. This is a warzone. You can't afford to think like that.

Snapping myself back into reality, I continue to fire my gun, taking down any enemy who crosses my path. *God forgive me for I am a sinner, I silently pray over and over,*

remembering the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector. I don't deserve to be forgiven. I know I don't, but I pray for it anyway, because God is a loving and forgiving Father.

The sky lights up as bombs fall from the sky like an unwanted rain. Shrapnel, rubble, and limbs scatter, and bullets come in torrential showers. Men rise, ready to defend their country's honor and their own pride, and then fall mutilated fifteen feet away. But I don't stop to give it much thought. This is war, and with war come casualties and destruction.

I look to where I had last seen my partner-in-crime, and realize that he's moved farther away, and is fifty feet from where I stand. He gives me a keen smile. As I am about to return it, something catches my eye.

"No!" I yell, but I already know I am too late. I'm too far away to stop it, and he is unable to react quickly enough. Three bullets. That's all it takes. Two hit him in the abdomen, and the other hits him in the chest. I run towards him, right through the line of fire. I shoot the man, who stands only a few feet away from my fallen comrade, once in the neck and once in the head. I don't stop to watch him fall, already knowing his fate. Instead, I sprint to my friend, my fallen brother.

"Shane," I breathe, pulling his head into my lap, and making sure we are safely covered. Not that there's much safety in the middle of a battlefield. "Hey buddy."

He whispered something incoherent. Detecting the confused look on my face, he tries his best to speak louder. "Liam...just a scratch." His voice fades more with every word.

"Yeah, just a scratch," I repeat with a weak smile. I know that Shane sees through my lie. He knows he isn't going to make it. As he begins to mumble something else, he coughs. It's an awful, wretched cough. Blood trickles out of his mouth and down his pale chin, dripping onto his already blood-stained uniform.

“Will you read me something out of that book you’re always reading?” he asks quietly.
“Can you please read me a verse, Liam? I want to be ready when I meet our Savior...”

“Of course,” I say, matching his quiet tone. I pause for several seconds, trying to collect myself, and then begin reciting something I once memorized in an attempt at self comfort. “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of His righteousness for His name’s sake,” I pause.

“Finish it, Liam,” he whispers so softly I almost miss it. I clear my throat, and fight back the little drops of water that threaten to spill from my eyes. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me...” I quietly finish it. His breathing is shallow, and his skin is pallid. More coughing comes, and blood spatters me and my uniform, but I do my best to stay strong for him. It’s harder than I imagined it would be. I don’t want to lose my best friend.

“Li...you-you take care of her, okay? Take care of my little sister. Make sure she doesn’t—“ he stops for a moment. “Make sure she doesn’t get into too mu-much trouble.”

“I will,” I promise, though it’s nearly impossible to promise anything like that. “I won’t let anything happen to her.”

“You better or I’ll-I’ll come back and kick your sorry ass.” It’s his last attempt at a joke, but it only triggers more coughing. I wince each time.

“You-you’ve always been like a brother, Liam. I-I love you bro.” His body tenses up and his grip tightens on me. He cries out and then goes limp in my arms. I don’t have to check for a pulse to know he’s gone. I close my eyes, and take a deep, shaking breath, before opening them again, and lowering Shane to the ground.

“I’m really sorry, Shane,” I apologize to the empty shell that used to be my best friend. “I really am. I love you too man.” I give him one last look, gently pull his dog tags off, and hang them around my own neck. Life isn’t fair. Of that I am absolutely certain.

I pick up my weapon, hastily reload it, and then stand. Anger courses through me. The world seems to slow down around me as irrationality takes over, and it’s almost like I can hear the ticking of a clock. It slowly realize it’s my own heartbeat. My childhood best friend, someone who was like my own flesh-and-blood brother is dead. He died in my arms. I just watched someone I had grown up with die right in front of my eyes, and now I want vengeance. Something ruptures inside of me. Bullets spring from my gun, swiftly embedding themselves into others around me. I don’t stop to watch them meet their ends. I have gone from soldier to maniac in a matter of minutes.

Shane won’t be able to marry now, or start a family and watch his children grow up. He won’t even have children. He won’t have the chance to recite all the stupid things he did in his youth to his grandchildren, as he sits in a rocking chair with a head full of gray hair and a face full of wrinkles. He won’t be able to live out the full life he’d always dreamed of. And if he doesn’t have that chance, then I don’t want these monsters who caused this, the monsters who dragged us into this war to have it either. Deep down I know this is the wrong way to go about it, but the irrational side of my brain doesn’t care.

A sudden, all-consuming pain overtakes my body. It begins in my upper back, and spreads swiftly until it reaches my feet. My body slams roughly to the ground. The pain is agonizing. All sound dims from my ears, except for the slowing beat of my heart. *Ba-dum. Ba-dum. Ba-dum. Ba-dum.* It’s getting louder and louder. I feel at the ring that sits upon my left hand. Smoke fills the air, but through the haze I see a star, the brightest I had ever seen. Moments in time flash

through my mind as I feel myself falling into the nothingness of the night. Images start to flicker like a silent film. I see the cross that hung on the front wall of the church I attended as a boy; the view from the Tennessee sky at sunset when my dad would take me up in his old, red crop duster; my high school; my wife walking down the aisle to me at our wedding; my wife playing in the ocean for our honeymoon, and beckoning me towards her, even though it was pouring rain; a positive pregnancy test; an ultrasound; and finally, the outline of my son's foot against my wife's stomach as he kicks for the first time.

I love you, Rose, I think of my beautiful wife. I picture her long, chocolate-colored curls falling over her shoulders and down her back, and her golden eyes that I fell so hard for. I hear her sweet voice whispering how much she loves me. I'm glad that she is what blocks my hearing and vision as the world begins to stop. I promised her brother that I would protect her, but I won't be able to uphold his request. I won't get to see her again; I won't get to hold her hand as she gives birth to our firstborn; I won't even get to meet him.. I should have tried harder to stay alive, to make it home to her and our son. And the thought that I won't make it back to her hurts me more than any bullet could.

I'm so sorry, the words appear in my mind. And then a pair of green eyes, the ones belonging to the first man I killed tonight, blink into appearance behind my eyelids. *Maybe, just maybe we weren't so different after all. We were all just players in a game*, I ponder, and then the world becomes dark as I breathe for the last time...