

I don't know why, but it felt kind of good to be in this frozen little foxhole with another guy whose grandmother spoke to him in a different language. It made me feel less like I was different from all the other guys. At basic training, nobody else spoke Spanish or talked about old folk tales or missed the tamales their grandmothers made.

The thought of fresh tamales made my mouth water. Army food wasn't good, and out here on the front, there wasn't much of it. I was already hungry.

I wanted to ask Goldsmith what kinds of food his grandmother made for him, but he asked me a question first.

"So, down in *New Mexico*, you got snow like this?"

"Nothing like this," I told him.

"You live in, what, the desert?"

"It's not really the —"

He didn't let me finish.

"I guess it don't snow much in the desert," he chuckled. "You know my people originally came from the desert. The Hebrews. Spent forty years wandering in the desert in ancient times. Must have been awful, but at least there wasn't all this snow, right? I'm freezing my schnoz off."

I just wrinkled my forehead at him. I didn't want to be rude, but I couldn't really follow what he was talking about.

“*Schnoz* means nose in Yiddish,” he said. “Like Jimmy Durante, the Great Schnozzola?”

I shrugged. I knew Jimmy Durante was some kind of performer, but I followed baseball, not singing and dancing.

“Oy, *boychick*, we gotta give you some culture.” Goldsmith shook his head and rolled his eyes at the sky.

“What’s *boychick*?” I asked.

“It’s like saying *kid*,” he explained.

“Like *vato* in Spanish?” I asked.

“*Vato*?”

“Just, like, a guy, a pal,” I said.

“*Vaaa-to, va-to, va-va-va-vato.*” Goldsmith played the word around in his mouth, stretched it, rolled it around. I guess we had something else in common aside from our grandmothers and their old stories. We both liked languages.

“So, *vato*,” he asked. “You wanna learn some Yiddish?”

The morning was pretty boring so far, so I told him sure I would. Maybe learning a few new words would pass the time. Now that we were talking, I realized it was definitely better than sitting in freezing silence, waiting for something to happen.

“Ok, I guess *yutz* is as good a place as any to start,” Goldsmith said.

“What’s it mean?”

“A *yutz* is like a fool,” he explained. “Like us!” He laughed and slapped at the icy ground in front of him. “Standing in this cold foxhole all night because some generals say we got to. Or, like Hitler, thinking he can beat the whole world in a fight. He’s a *yutz* and a half.”

“*Yutz*,” I repeated to myself. It was a fun word, felt good in the mouth, even though it was, I guess, kind of an insult.

“So you got some more Yiddish you can teach me?” I asked. “I can’t just go around calling everyone *yutz* all the time. I don’t want to get —”

“Shh!” He cut me off and grabbed his rifle. He ducked low. I ducked down beside him, so just our eyes and the barrel of his rifle poked above the top of our foxhole. We listened to the forest.

I couldn’t hear anything at first. Then there was a loud slap, like a book dropped onto the floor in a silent study hall, and then a whistle in the sky.

“Incoming! Take cover!” someone shouted from another foxhole down the line. I hadn’t even known there were any other foxholes up there with us. When I leaned up to try to

see who had shouted, Goldsmith yanked me back down just in time for the ground in front of us to explode.

Then another slap, a whistle, and another explosion.

A tree above us burst into flames and smoke, branches crashed onto the crunchy snow of the forest floor. Goldsmith jumped up and raised his rifle. My ears were still ringing and I stayed at the back of the foxhole for a second, kind of in shock. If Goldsmith hadn't pulled me down, I would have died.

He had just saved my life.

"Thanks!" I yelled, but he didn't hear me over the crack of his rifle and the whistle of the artillery.

The Germans were attacking.