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Instructor's Name

ENGL 1013

Date

My Ice

The heat is vicious beneath the burlap that camouflages me as I lie in my Ranger grave. The shallow hole that I had scratched out of the dry sand is just big enough for my body, concealing me just beneath the surface of the desert. A few stray thoughts work their way through the haze of dehydration in my brain. Mostly I dream about water: icy, sparkling, frosty, glimmering water. I can almost hear the ice cubes clinking in a Mason jar, dripping condensation as I lift it to my cracked lips. I barely notice the fine sand that is being driven by the relentless wind through the covering, filling my eyes again. I don't have enough fluid in my body to produce tears.

"Water truck!" The murmured call floats down the nearly invisible line of graves that stretches across the desert. There is hope in the voices that has been missing since our squad exhausted our water supply the night before.

As I lift the edge of my shroud, my raw eyes scan the horizon. Everything is tan: the ground, the air, the sky. In the distance, through shimmering waves of heat, I can barely make out the outline of a tan truck. It is driving away, leaving behind a water buffalo, a huge tank of water to re-supply the ground troops that are scattered throughout the area. Through my binoculars I can see the cooling unit on the tank. The ice in my head rattles excitedly.

"New guy goes." I hear the words with a sinking feeling. Since I am only six months past my seventeenth birthday, I am the youngest and newest member of the squad. That means

that I'm the one that has to hump the two miles or more across the scorching sands to bring back the desperately needed water. I don't know how I am going to make it.

I must carry all of my equipment with me: my monkey suit (the thick charcoal-lined suit that will supposedly protect me from Saddam's home-tested brews); my extra ammo; and, naturally, my machine-gun. I tie all the canteens together with a string so that I can drag them behind me. As I try to prepare the best that I can, I hear the cold splash of icy water in my mind.

When I start out toward the tank as quickly as my depleted body allows, it doesn't look that far away. The sugary-fine sand spills over the tops of my boots with every step. My uniform that I am so proud to wear is crusted with salt from my sweat. My helmet is a huge weight on my head, seeming to push me deeper into the powder. Everything on me is coated with the infernal sand. I appear a natural part of this desolate land. But inside my head the ice is chattering encouragement.

The wicked Arabian sun tortures me as I slowly make my way toward the promise of salvation wavering in the distance. With distracted interest, I am aware that I can't feel my tongue. As I reach up to inspect it, I notice my hand. It is gray with dust and shriveled from lack of water. It looks like my grandpa's hand. With these gritty, alien fingers, I touch the object that should be my tongue. It feels like the thick wad of cotton that comes in a bottle of aspirin. I stuff it back in my dry mouth where I seem to remember it belongs.

The merciless sun is my constant and only companion. The fiery orb bears down on me as I force my legs to keep carrying me across the endless sand. The tank is closer now, isn't it? Surely it is; I've been walking for hours in the late afternoon sun, my own shadow as the only shade in sight.

The ice clinks loudly as I finally get closer to the tank of water. My body doesn't seem to

hear it. My exhausted legs crumple under me. My eyes and mouth fill with sand again and again. I am beyond caring.

I WILL MAKE IT! I am a paratrooper! I am a member of the 82nd Airborne, the elite fighting force of the United States Army! This desert will not defeat me! The ice in my mind taunts me as I drag my rebellious body through the burning sand.

I made it! I grasp at the blistering steel of the truck, pulling myself up to the spigot on the tank. My mental ice is shivering in anticipation as I open my parched, blistered lips. My grandpa's hand grips the valve. It turns. Out gushes water: beautiful, sparkling, scintillating, pressurized.

It scalds my face, my mouth, and my eyes.

As I once again fall to my knees, I consider crying, but I have no tears. The rattling ice in my head has melted to slivers. It can barely be heard.

Somehow I manage to sip enough of the near-boiling water to revive my body a little. I fill the canteens, knowing that the survival of the rest of the squad depends on me. As I look over the barren landscape, I see nothing except the eternal sand and sun. The camouflage on the graves is doing its job well. I can only follow the almost-imperceptible footprints that the wind has left me for direction. I drag the now-full canteens back across the desert.

I'm not sure how I got here, but I am back in my hole under my covering. The blessed dark has fallen. My enemy, the sun, has withdrawn for a few hours. I am trying to dig. If I can just bury my canteens deep enough, the water will cool a little. I did not let my buddies down. Now I can rest.

“Saddle up! We're moving out!” The words explode around me like a grenade. The ice is no more.