

Chhaya Arora

## Instruments of War

“Hi, my name is Kierra Staley. I had an appointment with you, Ms. Martil, for 12.” I notified

“Yes, sit down, Ms. Staley”, came a monotonous voice from corner of the room.

She walked to her desk, picked up a dirty blue file, and set it in shelf. I stood up as well, and started the conversation again.

“I wrote the first part of my book and...” I hopelessly tried to make eye – contact with her, but it was no use. I stood, looking down to the brown floor and back up at Ms. Martil again when her eyes bored into mine. I stammered, “W—Well, I wrote a story about my grandfather and his life. It’s –

“Just get to the point”, she interrupted and started walking towards me.

“The basic story deals with the fact...” I stumbled backwards. “... that in the absence of peace and love,....” Another step ahead from her and one back from me. “...we teach war and hate...” I was walking backwards by now“...as an escape from the problems we are too lazy to solve” By the time, I had one foot in the door and another one out.

*Slam*

Another door and she closed it right in my face. I wish she would have the decency to actually listen. I took a deep breath and moved on. I tried to make myself understand, “this is what happens when you’re in the writing business – its fine.” But the truth was, it wasn’t fine. I

had gone through at least 12 publishers, no make that 13 now. But I just have to learn to move on. This wasn't the first time, it had happened numerous times before. It was a routine by now. It happened over and over again. I walk into a publication office and get the door slammed into my face as soon as I mention the word, "war". One publisher even told me, "I think you should just give up now. Readers would rather hear the next vampire romance story than a silly little thing as war" and then she slammed the door in my face. I walked out of the office and into the small yellow car to drive to the next publication office down the street. The bold black outline on top of the dusty brown building read, Stelman Publications. This was my last hope. It was the only publication office left in the whole region. I walked into the office and asked the guard at the door where Ms. Silverlight's office, and he pointed me towards the end of the hallway. I walked down and passed all the office workers looking exactly the same. Every step I took put me one step closer to my fate. I was nervous, excited, but for the most part terrified of the outcome, of her reaction. If she slammed the door again, my story would be done. I arrived at her door and knocked. A squeaky little voice came from inside.

"Come in" it said

I stepped into her office, ignoring everything but her face. I started my routine once again.

"Hi, my name is Kierra Staley and I have an appointment with you for my new book." I pointed out.

"Oh, yes! So, tell me what spicy new romantic drama are you bringing me today?" she beamed with excitement. *Here we go again - another publisher who cares more about fictional romance rather than a true story*, I thought.

“Well, you see my story is something different”

“What about? If not about romance, what other good story could you possibly give me?”  
she questioned

“My moral is that in the absence of peace and love, we teach war and hate as an escape from the problems we are too lazy to solve” I stated confidently.

Her puzzled expression gave me the answer I wasn't looking for. At that moment, I realized she was just like the others. I don't know why I thought otherwise.

“Listen, I'm really sorry but I don't think our company is just right for you at the moment.” She responded as she walked me out

I was silent for a few moments but when I realized that my last hope had just been destroyed, I couldn't bear it.

“Why?” I objected. “Why can you not just give my story a fair chance? Do you not realize what people suffer through life every day? People need to understand the world around them, and you're stopping them from achieving this. This is a true story about my grandfather when he was just a skinny eleven years old boy living in the poor villages of Burundi. His dark skin contradicted his white, innocent heart. At that time, you could see his bones piercing from his skin. But even under those conditions, he was understanding and flexible, but most of all he was loving. He would give his own food to his sister, to his family, and go to bed hungry at the age of eleven. His family, his sister meant the world to him. This is a story about how he was trained to be someone different. He was taught the art of war, and he was expected to change into a killing machine so that he could be prepared for war.”

By this time, everyone around the office could hear my voice booming. They had all stood up listening to me, and I realized that this was my chance – to finally tell my story

“In the absence of peace and love, we teach war and hate as an escape from the problems we are too lazy to solve” I informed to the whole room and then opened my book to the first chapter.

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-----PART I-----

“OPEN UP”, bellowed a voice outside of the rusty old brown door of our little house. I wondered who it could be, it was a little late at night to be coming to someone’s house. It –

“OPEN IT, NOW”, the voice roared again. This time my heart jumped a little. My mother slowly walked towards the door, terrified of the sight she would see when she would open it. She was cracking the door open when the men outside pushed it in. She fell backwards from the impact as I gasped. My sister was still sleeping on the floor. I gulped slowly and noticed the men in the center looking directly into my eyes. He was a large built men unlike the two standing behind him. They were all wearing a light brown uniform with their shirts tucked in and a gun at each of their sides. In their hands, they all held a black stick which they kept hitting on the side of the door over and over again. My breathing increased dramatically, as I saw him point that stick directly at me.

“You”, he said with a devilish smile on his face. “Come here” I walked towards him just as my mother had two minutes ago, terrified for my life. I was at least five steps away from him when he grabbed me by my collar and pulled me towards him, his face, inches away from mine

“How old are you?” he questioned without letting go of my collar. I was confused. Was I supposed to lie? What did he want to hear? What should I say? I looked around the room for any indication which would tell me the correct answer. I found none, and glanced back at him again and looked down at the floor.

“Eleven” I uttered truthfully, preparing for the worst to happen.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my mother picking up the old pan from the side of the kitchen. She used all her force and hit the large man holding me with the pan. He loosened his grip on me just enough so I could shake myself away from him. Forgetting about me, he turned towards my mother and gleamed at her with his bloodshot eyes. I felt pure terror through my body. She had put her life in risk just to save me, what was I supposed to do now? He put his hands in his pocket and out came a silver jackknife. He grabbed my mother by her hair and pulled her so she was facing me.

“Watch this” he warned.

My mother’s eyes were shut tightly, refusing to give him any satisfaction. He put his hand around her neck, and with another slowly traced the outline of her eyes. The knife starting from the tip of her nose and moving upwards until it reached the edge of her eyes. Then he circled around it as if extracting her eyes. My mother uttered no noise. She felt no pain, but I did. I wailed. I was absolutely terrified. Her blood was pouring out from her skin and I couldn’t even look at it. It made me want to throw up. The blood was gushing and I could do nothing to stop it. I felt absolute terror in my heart.

“You will come with me”, he uttered each word just as emphasis as the last hinting towards my bloody mother.

“Grab the girl” he commanded just as the other men picked my limbless sister.

“No, not Kiyoko” my mother screamed, but the men paid no attention to her and left my mother standing there, mourning the loss of her two children.

I turned around, and just started at my wailing mother. That picture has haunted me to this day.

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By the time the car had stopped, I had calmed down significantly. Not because, I, in the actual sense was calm, but because my brain and to some degree my body had stopped working. I couldn't bear the thought of my mother anymore. The only thing that comforted me was that she was alive. Everything was good as long as she lived, and I knew that my existence here would mark her living back in the village. Nonetheless, it was better if I just didn't think. It was better if I just acted somewhat normal. We slowly stepped off the jeep, first me and then my sister jumped. I waited for the men inside to come but instead the jeep roared and left us standing in the dust. I looked at my surroundings. The building appeared to be old, abandoned, and grey in color. A small white wall protected the building from invaders. The only evidence that gave a sign of use was the newly painted words in black bold ink, “Draconia Center of Learning.” I wonder why that name sounded so familiar. Nevertheless, I firmly held my sister's hand and entered the building.

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I entered the class with my sister at my hand. The bland white walls covered this hole and in it were 20 desks for each student and one brown rusty table in the middle of the classroom.

The class was filled when we entered. No one in the class divulged a single sound. For miles, you could hear this piercing silence. There were only two corner desks left at the end of the room. I instructed my sister to take the seat next to mine and looked straight ahead at the board. It's emptiness screamed for noise. I looked around all the students looked the same with red a sweater and khaki pants as us.

Suddenly, the door opened. From the corner of my eyes, I saw a blonde woman with short hair, tied back into a ponytail. Her small face peeked behind the door, and then suddenly, her tall body emerged as she stepped inside the classroom and walked towards the empty brown desk. Her black eyes sensed mine and he turned to face me - she had noticed; I was new.

"Good Morning, class," she uttered every word just as careful as the last. Her eyebrows perched up signaling the class to speak.

"Good Morning Miss Quella" the class spoke just as carefully.

Her eyes examined every single student as if recording all of the information vigilantly into her brain, not leaving behind any single detail. She gave the slightest of nods indicating the class to take their seats. She took one stepped closer to the class and then turned to the board.

I glanced towards my sister, she looked tired. But I couldn't whisper anything. Even a glance at her might have been too long under these circumstances. I quickly turned back to Ms. Quella.

"Please pay attention; you will be learning how to operate one of these."

She turned towards the board and started drawing a rectangular figure and then another over the top of the previous one. I leaned closer trying to understand the topic of class today.

When she was done with her image, I couldn't help but gasp with surprise. It was a gun. A million thoughts started rushing in my head. Ms. Quella had heard me. She turned around and walked towards me, I gulped. But instead of talking to me, she turned towards my sister and leaned closer only to yell. "You will stay after class, Kiyoko. No excuses. Thank You". And she walked back towards the board to continue teaching the class

I looked down at my sister. Her face turned, eyes widened, and she too gulped. All she had done was get a little sleep. Why did she have to stay after class? I tried to comfort her. Tell her it'll be okay. But she never heard a word of it. I wouldn't have heard a word either, Ms. Quella wasn't even talking to me, and I was scared for my life.

The bell rang and more blood traveled to my sister's face out of nervousness. She sat in her seat sniffing softly. I put a hand on her shoulder as if to comfort her but it failed, and ultimately I too trudged out of the class. As I was taking my final steps, I saw Ms. Quella take something out of her drawer and a man appeared from the back door. She then continued to shut all of the doors and windows - the room became a dark, endless hall. I had no choice but to continue without her, but as I walked down the hallway, I heard the zipper roll down and the wails get louder.

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My sister rushed to join the lines in the abandoned field. She held the MR Rifle firmly in her arms refusing to let it go. My gaze shifted more closely towards her face. I noticed the freshly appeared scars and wounds on her face, the blood dripping from the edge of her lip, and tears dripping down from the corner of her eyes. It angered me thinking about who would do that to my sister. Who would hurt a little girl?



But I knew the answer. I knew it the minute I walked out of the door. I knew it, but I was just too afraid to accept anything.

Mr. Damon blew his cigarette and then blew his whistle and everyone started to shoot at the target boards, including me. The rush of the gun was something I had never experienced. With every trigger pressed, more excitement came rushing towards me. It was a thrill that I never in my wildest dream imagined.

Mr. Damon smiled devilishly, “Good. Good. You’re almost ready”

He turned around and noticed my sister had just joined the line. He threw the burning cigarette out of his mouth and smirked as he saw her wounds and scars. He walked towards my sister and pressed the burning cigarette tightly to her forehead leaving a scar. My sister hissed from the pain and then continued to cry in agony. My fists tightened and my eyes widened. I was sickened by his action - a burning cigarette into her forehead. No one uttered a word even. I could hear my heart pumping faster as my anger rose.

“Rule breakers are not accepted” he roared. “Examples will be made.” His voice echoed through the dead field. *Examples will be made...Examples will be made.*

He grabbed my sister by her hair and dragged her to the wall. My heart skipped beats after beats. What was he doing to her? I just couldn’t comprehend his motives.

He walked along the line as everyone continued to stare forward. I couldn’t help but shiver but everyone stood as if they were made of stone. He paced through the line, pausing for mere seconds in front of some students. I watched him eye the last student but then he saw me: the perfect target. He smiled. He grabbed me by my hair and dragged me to the same wall. I stood facing my sister eye to eye. He gave me a menacing grin and handed me a giant, shining

rifle. Her eyes started back at mine, my sister's baby brown eyes full of terror. I couldn't breathe. I felt trapped; I gaped at the gun not wanting to touch it.

"Take it!" he yelled. Without another thought, I picked up the gun. It was as if his voice was a command to me that I could not ignore. He turned me around to face my sister.

"Do it. It'll make you stronger." He whispered in my ear and stepped back. I could hear dead silence and then suddenly a voice - his voice boomed throughout the outdoor fields

"Do it."

"Kill her," he bellowed

Suddenly, my fingers appeared on the trigger and the gun clicked. Before I knew it, a bullet had escaped from the gun and had gone through my sister's head. What had I done! The reality dawned on me and in shock I dropped the gun and stared at my my sister's lifeless blood covered body. I couldn't think. I couldn't process anything around me. I cried - I wailed my eyes out that Saturday afternoon. The bell rang. I sat there. I stood there, waiting somehow for my sister to get up and smile at me; maybe she was just playing dead. I waited and waited while the shock was unable to set in.

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After hours, I had decided to go get something to eat even though I wasn't hungry. As soon as I entered and sat at the table, Mr. Damon walked towards me.

"You are good - a natural, even. You will be ready soon. You will be ready to fight. You want to, don't you?" he mockingly asked me the question. I knew the answer that I had to give. There was only one answer you could ever give if you wanted to live. I nodded my head afraid that my voice would deceive me.

He smirked, "Good."

He traced his steps back to the line of teachers, crossed his arms around his shoulders, and with humor in his eyes, stared at me. He took out a cigarette from his pack and lit it. He took one blow in and then blew it at me.

I glanced at him and then my food in front of me. It was because of him that I killed my sister. How could I do that to her? I had watched her grow up. I had watched her while my mother went out and father was in the field. I had watched her take her baby steps. I had given her my food when she didn't have any. How could I do that? I disgusted myself. How could I hear him over my sister? How? How? My thoughts seemed to echo over and over again, and there was only one question ringing in my head.

How?

I sighed. There was nothing left here. My mother had given me one responsibility, and I even let her down. I was appalled by my actions. I wanted to cry but I couldn't, not when he was watching my every move. It was as if it was a sick joke for him. I had killed my sister just so he could get a laugh out of it. How could I do that to my own sister?

I got out of my seat and walked towards the trash can and threw the food away. I couldn't eat, not when I had just seen my sister's blood seeping through her clothes, not when I had seen my sister's body limp less and lifeless.

I rushed out of the dining hall and lingered into the dorm rooms. The dorm room seemed to stretch for miles with nothing but beds lining in a straight line just as we were when I killed my sister. Her face flashed in front of my eyes again. Every thought, every action reminded me of her. I wanted to cry once more, but I couldn't. In one day, I had figured out that this place

wasn't safe. Show your weakness and your dead. I couldn't be dead not when these people were still alive – not when he was alive.

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I walked outside; the black name mocking me, Draconia Learning Center. What learning center? The name echoed once more. The name sounded so familiar and then I remembered my father had once mentioned the name when he was talking about the tribal war in the village next doors. Draconia was another name for the Ukhvan tribe. That was it! The name wasn't common, barely known by the people. The school was administrated by a tribe. They were preparing us for war.

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After hours of thinking and careful planning, I had found a way to get myself out of here. It was too late to save the others now. They were too deep into the training and brainwashing to realize the nature of the school. I, on the other hand, had hope left. I had planned out my escape. But until then I had to wait. The only thing I could do now was to wait until nightfall when my revenge would finally play out and when my freedom would be found again

I lay wide awake in my dorm as Mr. Damon walked the dorm rooms, watching every one sleep. I, too pretended to play along. After an hour or so, he left. I packed the things that I might need. Some clothes, leftover dinner, and some water in a small green bag and slung it over my shoulder. I was ready. This was it. I cautiously crept out of the room. The danger of this project was immense. I walked towards the kitchen to find some oil. I found an enormous bottle. Yes! The oil was more than enough to cover the exit doors of the school. I tried to lift it and realized it was too heavy, but there was no returning point. I carried the bottle throughout the building

pouring the oil in every corner and on every wall. It was time. Now came the hard part, I knew where his office was, I just had to find his lighter. I tip toed across the hall wall, then

*Smack.*

. The noise was too loud. But, it was too late because Mr. Damon had already rushed out of his office to check on the students once more. His eyes met mine and he saw what I had done. I ran as fast I could. I slipped everywhere, but at this point I had no choice I just kept running. I looked behind to see him catching up to me. I had to go around to get to his room, now. He was so close to me. He grabbed my shoulder, but I shook him off. His grip was no match for my adrenaline rush. I ran, he slipped. He ran again, but I ran harder. By the time I reached his room, I was panting. I closed the door, and put a chair right underneath the doorknob so he couldn't open it. He growled, "Open it, now." But his voice had no effect on me this time. I frantically searched for the lighter in the drawers. It wasn't there. One dreadful thought emerged my mind, What if it was with him? Every bone in my body was shaking because I was so nervous. I was having trouble opening and searching for the lighter, but I remembered the burning cigarette pressing into my sister's forehead, his voice booming through the fields commanding me to kill my sister, the knife carving into my mother's face. I saw everything, and it gave me strength. It gave me power. I looked at the door. He was almost in, he pushed and grunted to remove the chair. Finally, he opened the door. A sigh originated from his lips. He stepped closer, I stepped back. He took another step closer, and I took another one back but this time I was met with his bed. I lost my balance and fell on the bed. He laughed and sneered, *Tisk – Tisk* "You were good, you could have been amazing. Such a shame to let a perfectly good soldier to die" *Tisk – Tisk*

He grasped my arm and I grabbed the first thing I could reach. It was his pillow. I threw it at him and his face flushed with anger. Without hesitation he raised his hand and slapped me. My face turned towards the edge of the bed and I saw hope. I saw the lighter was placed where the pillow had been seconds ago. I clasped the lighter and kicked the end of his feet with all my strength. He stumbled, giving me just enough time to run. He realized the consequences of my action but it was too late. I turned around the corner and clicked the lighter, a fire emerged behind me. I sprinted for my life once more. I was out of the building. I took a sigh of relief. Then I ran towards the one of the four corners of the building and lighted the fire once again. I saw a glimpse of Mr. Damon running towards the third exit. I competed, he was too late. I lit another fire but he had the chance to get out. This time, I smirked not him. I could finally breathe again – my freedom was more prominent with every burning piece of the building.

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I stood there contemplating my life. I realized my life had no purpose, anymore. I had a sister who was dead. I had a mother for whom their children had already died. I had realized that I had nothing to live for. I glanced sideways and saw a cell phone estranged out from the fire. I slowly extended my arms out, careful not to get any dirt on my hands. I picked up the phone. As if sensing my presence, the phone came to life. It started buzzing. I clicked the right button and found something I had never in the darkest of my days imagined. My stomach churned as I realized the meaning behind the picture in the text. It was as if my eyes had deceived me. I re-read the message, analyzed the picture, but it was all there. A picture of a man, I had never expected to see. This could only mean one thing. The school was administered by the government.

After burning the school down, evil had only been curtailed for the moment. I knew my purpose now, to rebel; to fight against everything that the government stood for – to fight against war. Because avenging my sister’s death and my mother suffering was just the first step.

-----END OF PART I-----

Tears had started to well up in the eyes of the workers.

“Do you see now? Do you see what they do to little kids? They turn them into ruthless training machines. They force them to kill their family. Why? Because some people have decided that they will teach war and hate instead of peace and love to solve problems.”