

### Wavelength

When you needed a volunteer, the Gunner was always first in line. It felt like he'd come straight out of an old movie, a good-hearted, fearless action hero. But when you got back from that mission, he looked a million miles away. «What's wrong?». The spoon trembled in his fingers. «He got on the mission to follow my lead. And now he's dead». You squeezed his shoulder and he got right back to his chow. That was the only time you ever saw him cry.

*Trauma:* You keep seeing those faraway eyes. You keep feeling those cold tears. But after a while you realise they are your own.

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You had been marching for hours, maybe days. Under the merciless rain, every fibre of your body begged for the torture to end. When you were almost sure your prayers would go unanswered, the Gunner stepped up to your side and sneaked a hand around your waist. Sharing your weight with him almost felt like flying. You could hear his laboured breath in-between jokes and words of encouragement, but his tireless step carried you both to the destination.

*Trauma:* You want to fly like you did then, but you're stuck to this horrible chair. You can't stand it.

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Everyone makes mistakes. Not all mistakes are equal. Yours was catastrophic: You'd sent a message on the wrong wavelength and led everyone to an ambush. One of the survivors realised it was your fault. «You sent us all to die! What the Hell is wrong with you?». With every word came a kick. The others let him, and you didn't even try to defend yourself. You deserved it. The only one who stepped in was the Gunner. He dragged him away, kept him from beating you to death.

*Trauma:* Whenever you feel like you're not doing enough, you always feel one of those kicks straight in the stomach. Today is one such day.

### Wavelength

You'd been on the front lines for too long. Barring the camaraderie with the boys, your only solace were letters from home. As you sat in your bunk that night, you were so eager to open the envelope. "I'm sorry, I can't wait for you anymore". The Gunner heard you crying from the bunk above and cajoled you into telling him everything. Then he got out his harmonica and began playing. His off-key singing woke up the entire platoon. By the end of it you were laughing with everyone else.

*Trauma:* You want to sing that song, but you can't remember the words and there's no music left for you to hear. You can just whistle in vain, trying to guess the tune.

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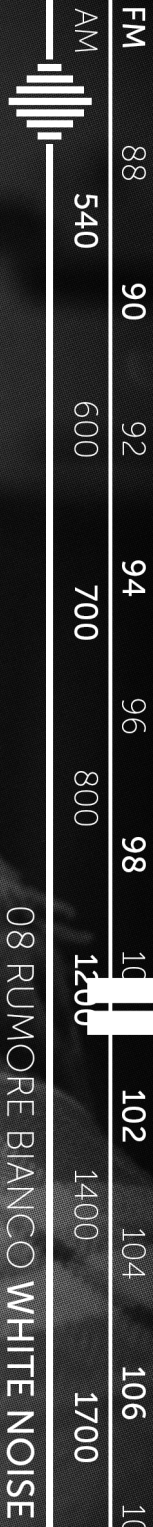
A shot. Pain. Hidden in the bushes, a kid in a different uniform. You and the Recruit cornered him against the side of a cliff. With no way to escape, he kept pulling the trigger, but he'd run out of bullets. You pointed your gun at him and grit your teeth at the pain in your shoulder. He fell to his knees and shut his eyes tight. Then the Recruit laid a hand on your arm and shook his head. You turned your back to the boy and let your comrade lead you away.

*Trauma:* A throb in your shoulder that refuses to go away, a lingering question: Would you have pulled the trigger?

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You can still feel it in your bones, the chill of that night in the mountains. The cold sneaked in your thoughts like mist and froze them off one by one. You couldn't even feel sorry for yourself. «I'm cold». It was the Recruit, sitting off to your side. You didn't even look at him. Until he hugged you. At first you stiffened up, then you began to feel his warmth. You slept like that for the night, holding each other close. The Recruit taught you the simplest gesture could make all the difference in war.

*Trauma:* The chill is back to torment you, you can feel its sting again. You're barely able to bend your fingers.



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You'd fallen behind because of your twisted ankle. You, the Recruit and another soldier. You could already smell the chow cooking inside the camp, when your leg gave out and you tumbled down the hill. You yelled you were okay and the other soldier ran straight towards his dinner. The Recruit understood you needed help, though, and as he helped you get back up to the path you stumbled upon a cluster of delicious mushrooms. He spent the whole night cooking them for the company.

*Trauma:* A twinge of pain in your ankle brings you back to the present. How you miss the Recruit and his warm mushroom stew.

### Wavelength

It was hard to get any sleep with that fever. All around you people were snoring. But the Recruit was sitting on your bunk, looking through old pictures. He met your eyes and began showing you. Then he began telling stories. He missed home and you did too, a little bit more with every word he said. Someone muttered a protest at every half-whisper, but it didn't matter. You dozed off with a nostalgic smile on your face, finally at peace.

*Trauma:* A shiver runs down your spine whenever you least expect it. You miss those moments dearly.

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A man should die in his own bed, at a ripe old age, surrounded by family. Not at twenty, crying and puking up bile as gas burns through his lungs. As you stared at the lifeless body that had been your bunkmate an hour ago, the Chaplain's voice made its way to you. «I could tell you he's sitting at God's side, but I'd rather tell you he's finally done suffering. And that I'm here for you, every time you need it».

*Trauma:* You breathed in that gas too. You're wracked by coughing fits, especially when you're overcome by emotion.

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You dragged yourself through the field, clumsy and awkward in the boots two sizes too big the quartermaster had stuck you with. Someone's cruel idea of a prank sent your precious lunchbox flying in the mud, to the laughter of everyone around. The Chaplain was the only one who kept quiet, helped you up and shared his ration with you. He didn't say a word, but the next day you found boots your size sitting outside your tent. Suddenly he was the one stumbling around amid general laughter.

*Trauma:* Humiliation still stings your cheeks red. Your voice just fizzles out and your eyes become glued to the floor.

### Wavelength

You were walking with the Chaplain. In no man's land, deep in the night, gathering what was left of the mangled bodies. You were looking at your feet in terror, afraid of stepping on a landmine, when you saw him stop dead, his shoulders straight, his head held high. A perfect target for a sniper. «Have you ever seen such a beautiful sky? For all that we keep killing each other, the stars shine for us just as they do for the enemy». He's mad, you thought. Or perhaps he's pure. Perhaps he's wise.

*Trauma:* You're still afraid of the dark. If you're not in full light, you begin shaking and you bring up your guard.

### Wavelength

You had been wounded. It was a bad one. Sitting there in the hospital tent, waiting to heal or die, tortured by throbbing pain and scalding fevers. In your delirium you screamed and cursed, praying for the pain to end once and for all. When you woke up, the Chaplain was there, with tired eyes and a prayer book in hand. He'd refused to give you the last rites, watching over you for two whole days. Sometimes you wondered if the Chaplain actually believed in God. He certainly believed in you.

*Trauma:* Ghost and shadows came to greet you at Death's door. Today they're back to visit and they're all around you.

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You'd been ordered to climb that tiny ladder by the hundreds and assault the enemy trench after charging through no man's land. A death sentence to gain a few measly inches of land. Yet the Officer stepped forward without hesitation: «I'll lead you through!». That took courage and he seemed to have enough for the both of you. So you followed him through the mud, you followed him through the bullets and you'd have followed it to the very end. If only that grenade hadn't gone off under your feet.

*Trauma:* You keep feeling the echo of the explosion, like a shrill ring constantly stabbing into your eardrums.

### Wavelength

It was never easy to sleep at night. The evening was a time for songs, to the war you'd left on the field and to the loves you'd left back home. But with night came the cold and the hunger. There were rations and blankets for everyone, but there were barely enough. The Officer always said fighting made him lose his appetite: In the darkest nights, he opened his knapsack and shared what little dinner he had with you and the rest of his friends. You never mustered the will to make the same sacrifice.

*Trauma:* At least now your belly is full. Yet you still feel that knot in your stomach. Is it just the guilt?

### Wavelength

Onwards, marching onwards, ever onwards. In war, days begin melting into each other. Faces begin blurring together. Hunger feels like thirst, right feels like wrong. Onwards, marching onwards, ever onwards. But the Officer was different. «What do you have there? Let me see». With the helmet covering it, nobody had noticed your head wound. Even you had forgotten about it. But he had a few words with the nurse and so you were treated before it began festering.

*Trauma:* You still feel your temples throbbing for that stray bullet. It's like you can't escape the Officer's gaze.

### Wavelength

Shouts in the dark, jolting awake, a desperate friend lying half-dead. Medics rushing to and fro. One of many sleepless nights spent with eyes wide open, looking for signs of the next wretched friend destined to die. Only distant screams, even more terrible. When you lost all hope of sleeping, you went looking for the Officer and his firm voice and the nice poetry book with the worn cover: «I have never held on / so hard / to life».

⚡ *Trauma:* You see the horror lurking behind your eyelids and suddenly you start repeating those verses, like a magic spell to save yourself.



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