

The Wall

When the group across the street started firing, I picked Erin up and threw her in the pickup bed. Angela started to run, but I caught her left shoulder and twisted her down behind the rear tire.

I realized my mistake with Erin when the bullets started pinging on the pickup. I reached inside the bed and pulled her over the side next to Angela.

The hail of bullets was tearing the truck apart. I returned fire with my nine, but it was mostly for show; they wouldn't let me get a sighted shot off.

I looked behind me at the concrete wall that surrounded our place. It promised protection from the angry, buzzing projectiles filling the air around us. A figure on the wall was waving. It was Gerald, Angela's father. He was pointing to our left. I saw defenders massing away from us at the wall.

A gambit! It might work. Hiding behind the nearly destroyed pickup, I see the attackers moving in and maintaining a steady stream of fire to keep us pinned down. As I plan our next move, I realize we're not all going to make that wall.

I look at the girls and know this is all about them. They have to reach the safety of the wall. The attackers are moving closer; their guns fire in a steady stream. There is no way to move yet. The gambit better work quickly, or they'll be on us in a few more moves.

Suddenly, a louder cacophony of weapons fire crashes into the deafening sounds of war that fill the air. The attackers' firing line wavers as the defenders cut men down, leaving holes in their fields of fire.

I grab the girls and push them ahead as we run to the wall. Erin, the youngest, stumbles and falls. Angela turns toward her, but I push her on. Reaching down, I snatch Erin by her slender waist and lift her off the ground. I run a few steps; Erin's head is down, her arms pinwheeling in the air, and her legs kicking behind my back.

I slow down enough for Erin's feet to touch the ground and let her run. Angela's about six feet ahead of us. I start to fall forward and push Erin ahead as my knees hit the ground. She starts to turn back to me, but I heave myself up and push her forward. The wall is thirty feet ahead of us.

I realize my right calf was hit. I didn't stumble.

Twenty feet from the wall, the bullets are angry hornets pinging on the concrete wall, pockmarks, and a little clouds of dust are their angry testimony. Angela reaches the wall and strong arms pull her over.

I stumble again. The sharp burning pain courses through my lower back, damn hornets!

Erin's tennis shoes, pink and white, disappear over the wall as a heavy blow strikes my back, knocking me to the ground five feet from the wall.

I look up at the wall as blood floods my throat and mouth. The coppery taste won't let me breathe. I see Gerald looking at me. His eyes fill with sorrow and gratitude as black clouds obscure my vision and silence swallows me.

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