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This Avalanche Scene from ICE tells of a New Yorker's desperate struggle to survive during WWI, on the Italian Front in the Alps.

Ben lowered Enzo onto the snow. He broke the ice from the unconscious soldier's bootlaces. The ankles of the kid's boots had locked onto his wool socks. Enzo's boot-leather, socks and feet had turned into rigid glass as solid as rocks. The young Italian had paid a high price for mounting guard on the backside of this snowy dome.

There were no heroes in the Alps, Italian or Austrian, only the suffering and dead, and this shanghaied American. Soldiering in the Great War-the war to end all wars-way tougher than breaking rocks in the New York subway dig.

Ben swung Enzo back onto his shoulder and coiled the rope that joined them. Ice ax in hand, he thrust himself up the dome. His home town lay on the other side of the world from these bloody Alps, the land back there as flat as a flapjack, warm compared to this frigid hell on earth.

A panorama unfolded before him as he crested the dome, distant peaks, some sharp, others rounded, all of them decked with dazzling white. White didn't stand for purity or innocence any longer, not since this rotten war.

On he toiled, listening to his thudding heart, doing his utmost to pace himself. He'd gotten in this damned mess through fighting with an Italian soldier in a bar, and the guy's buddies had nabbed him. The captain of their Alpini platoon forced him into service. They'd used him as a donkey to help lug their machinegun up Mt. Marmolada. He didn't owe them a damned thing, yet he'd set about carrying one of their guys back to the trenches. He must have gone soft in the head.

Ben looked down the deep powder of the dome to what must be the Italian blockhouse a few hundred yards below, the platoon's hang out.

He'd fought alongside the Italian Alpini when they pushed the Austrians out of the trench. Christ knows why he'd done it. Their crazy captain hated his guts, had called him

an Americano thug. The guys in the platoon tried to get under his skin and make a compatriot out of him. Screw them, though, he ought to dump Enzo now and run.

But he could never leave Enzo behind, not when the guy looked so much like Dave his kid brother. He couldn't let Enzo die, not after he'd seen his brother blown to bits in the dig beneath New York.

Dizzy and out of breath, Ben stared at the blockhouse. A man in white camouflage with his back to the dome crouched in front of the machinegun, the captain. The rest of the platoon must be in the blockhouse.

Ben's legs crumpled from under him as he missed his footing. He fell, dropping Enzo, burying them both in snow.

Enzo moaned.

Ben righted himself, dug white mush from his eyes. He heard a faint rumbling noise. But it couldn't be thunder, the sky looked clear, and the rumbling didn't sound like gunfire.

Swaying, Ben swung the young soldier back across his shoulders using strength borne of panic. He tried to block out the pain as he plodded on.

The hammering of the platoon's machinegun echoed from the blockhouse. Its harsh noise seemed to shake the dome and its snow. No, the whole mountain had started to move, because of that damned fool captain.

Snow below and around Ben shifted a few inches. The hammering sound of the gun loosened something large. He tried to go faster.

Despite glare from the sun, Ben caught sight of a stream of powder shooting over a white mound above, like water from a chute. Several snowballs the size of marbles rolled down and fanned out as they approached him, leaving tracks in the powder.

Out of breath, he stopped, and sank to a sitting position. He did his best not to tip Enzo from his shoulders.

His heart pounded as he watched a snow-marble roll straight toward him. Closer it came, growing fatter, gaining momentum as it reached the size of an apple. It hit his left arm with a smack, exploding as if to show it meant business.

He knew that snow always kept shifting, yielding to gravity, and often cascaded down mountains as an avalanche. A crash a minute, or so it appeared on Marmolada when guns

were blazing. Snow as powder, solid crust or slippery white cement always seemed to be thundering down.

Up to his waist in powder, Ben glanced below and saw the captain peer upward. The man must have seen him and Enzo up here, perched on this hair-trigger bomb of an avalanche.

The snow around him shifted again, driving home the peril. Ben lowered Enzo and circled his arms around him. He sat hugging him, afraid to move again lest he set the slope in full motion, let loose the hundreds of tons the last blizzard had dumped on the dome.

A crack opened in the white above them, a dark, widening break that traversed the incline. They began to slide downward through no doing of their own. They weren't slipping on the slope's surface, the whole slope shifted with them, a slow and agonizing start to a deluge.

There could be no mistaking the swelling, deep-throated rumble of a flood of snow. The ground dissolved from under them, churning, pregnant with snarling violence. Up or down had no significance any more. The avalanche tossed them around like corks in pounding surf, arms and legs flailing. But he wouldn't let go of Dave, he mustn't. Damn, he didn't have hold of Dave; he clutched Enzo.

The rope shredded. Marmolada ripped his brother from his arms. "Enzo," he shouted into the foaming whitewash. Ben grabbed at a dark shape in front of him, but it whirled away before he could latch onto it. "Dave," he yelled.

A monster wave seized Ben between its teeth and made an all-engulfing lunge at the blockhouse. He couldn't do a damned thing to help himself or Enzo, or the guys below. An enormous release of hellish white looked like sweeping away the whole Alpini platoon.

"Dave," he screamed. But the answer came from the mountain, which rammed his mouth full of gritty snow. He coughed, spat out icy mush. His heart beat fast than a squirrel's.

Booming, billowing white smashed into him from all sides, spinning him as fast as a top. The frigid surf tore at his white camouflage, snapping his ax strap.

Disoriented, he tumbled through a sea of relentless fury, fumbling for his ice ax, not finding it, at the same time trying to swim to the surface. Keep your fat mouth closed, a

voice inside him yelled. He spat out snow the avalanche rammed into his face and down his throat.

He slammed into a rock. Pain shot up his right arm. The snow pinned him against hard stone, shoved on him until he thought his chest would cave in. His breath came in strangled gasps. A mass of snow hurtled past him, a thundering express train grinding its gears. It swept him from the rock and engulfed him as he pitched downward.

Again, his body hung up on something solid. The weight on him lessened, and he heard a pounding, earthshaking tremor that seemed to go on forever.

The frosty fog around him cleared. As it did, the reflected glare of the sun hurt as much as if someone flashed a searchlight in his face. For a fearful moment, he couldn't see a thing. But by some miracle, most of him ended up on the surface of the snow, and upright.

White concrete jammed one of his legs against a rock, snow that a few moments ago had been fresh powder. It buried him up to the hip, gripped him as tight as a vise. He couldn't feel sharp pain in the leg, only numbing cold. It didn't appear broken. He had to get free and find Enzo.

Right below him, he could make out shiny ice, but he had to pull his gaze away to let the flashing colors in his eyes subside. Trapped and confused, he kept fretting about losing Dave. He strained to focus his vision. Beyond the ice he could make out a jumble of white lumps, avalanche debris. Here and there he saw black shapes, sharp, jagged rocks tossed up to the surface, torn from the dome.

His throbbing eyes gazed at the trench, or what had been the trench. He stared, breathed hard and wondered if he'd suffered a nightmare. No, the avalanche buried the trench and the blockhouse in tons of snow and ice.

Without his ax, he had nothing to use to dig himself out. He snatched off his gloves, clawed at the white cement that trapped his leg, dug like an animal.

Precious seconds raced past. He had to reach Dave. No, he meant Enzo.

Ben could see his knee now. Pink snow around his pants, pink, his nails had split and the fingertips bled like leaky faucets. He gritted his teeth and tugged his leg hard. For a moment, he thought he would pull off his foot. His boot came loose from the cement. He overbalanced, sliding headfirst down glare ice, swung sideways and hit a ridge of packed snow with a sickening crunch.

He saw the rope a few feet away, and crawled to it, snatching it up, following it to where it vanished into the white. Ben struggled to his feet, heaved on it. More of it popped into the open. He lost his balance, falling sideways but landing on all fours.

Downward he crawled over blocks of snow, loose rocks and ice chunks, following the rope, too shaky to stand. Fear raged through him. The rope disappeared back into the iron crust. He clawed with raw fingers, not denting the glassy white. Ben stood and began jumping on it in a frenzy of fury, chopping up its surface with the spikes on his boots. He dropped onto his knees, scratched and clawed. He stood, stamped, sank down and scratched like a fiend. Something black showed, not the white camouflage he sought, but it could be a boot. No, a rock. Ben yanked on the rope. It came free, but he only saw frayed fibers. No Dave. No Enzo.

As he stared at the debris that swallowed the young soldier, and the others in the trench, the eerie quiet of a graveyard settled on him. They'd all gone, iced in, entombed, very near but impossible to reach.

When Marmolada had avalanched it avalanched his feelings. He knew he cared about the Alpini soldiers now. The mountain snatched away a bunch of guys he could have learned to like. Hell, he'd fought by their side. He must have liked them. They were his friends, yet he couldn't help them. They would remain buried here forever by Marmolada.

He'd had it with all this fighting and killing, and this vicious mountain. He'd go down and search for Carmela in the towns. Sealed in white cement, the captain couldn't stop him.

When he found Carmela, he'd take her somewhere safe where they could live in peace. But he would never forget the guys in the platoon: Arturo the bear, Gilberto the skirt chaser, Ettore with the clear tenor voice, or Enzo who reminded him so much of Dave that it gave him heartache.

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