

GROWING UP, GRANDPA PORTMAN WAS THE MOST FASCINATING PERSON I KNEW, AND I BEGGED HIM TO REGALE ME WITH STORIES WHENEVER I SAW HIM.

HE HAD LIVED IN AN ORPHANAGE, FOUGHT IN WARS, CROSSED OCEANS BY STEAMSHIP AND DESERTS ON HORSEBACK, PERFORMED IN CIRCUSES, KNEW EVERYTHING ABOUT GUNS AND SELF-DEFENSE AND SURVIVING IN THE WILDERNESS.

THE TALLEST TALES WERE ALWAYS ABOUT HIS CHILDHOOD, LIKE HOW HE WAS BORN IN POLAND BUT AT TWELVE HAD BEEN SHIPPED OFF TO A CHILDREN'S HOME IN WALES BECAUSE THE MONSTERS WERE AFTER HIM. IT WAS AN ENCHANTED PLACE, HE SAID, DESIGNED TO KEEP KIDS SAFE FROM THE MONSTERS, ON AN ISLAND WHERE THE SUN SHINED EVERY DAY AND NOBODY EVER GOT SICK OR DIED. EVERYONE LIVED TOGETHER IN A BIG HOUSE THAT WAS PROTECTED BY A WISE OLD BIRD.





I REALLY DID BELIEVE HIM — FOR A FEW YEARS, AT LEAST. WE CLING TO OUR FAIRY TALES UNTIL THE PRICE FOR BELIEVING THEM BECOMES TOO HIGH, WHICH FOR ME WAS THE DAY IN SECOND GRADE WHEN ROBBIE JENSEN PANTSED ME AT LUNCH IN FRONT OF A TABLE OF GIRLS AND ANNOLINCED THAT I BELIEVED IN FAIRIES. I GUESS GRANDPA'D SEEN IT COMING —I HAD TO GROW OUT OF THEM EVENTUALLY — BUT HE DROPPED THE WHOLE THING SO QUICKLY IT LEFT ME FEELING LIKE I'D BEEN LIED TO.



IT WASN'T UNTIL A FEW YEARS LATER THAT MY DAD EXPLAINED IT TO ME.

THEY WEREN'T LIES, EXACTLY, BUT EXAGGERATED VERSIONS OF THE TRUTH — BECAUSE THE STORY OF GRANDPA PORTMAN'S CHILDHOOD WASN'T A FAIRY TALE AT ALL. IT WAS A HORROR STORY.

MY GRANDFATHER WAS THE ONLY MEMBER OF HIS FAMILY TO ESCAPE POLAND BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR BROKE OUT, EVERY MEMBER OF HIS FAMILY WAS KILLED BY THE MONSTERS HE HAD SO NARROWLY ESCAPED.

THE CHILDREN'S HOME THAT HAD TAKEN IN MY GRANDFATHER MUST'VE SEEMED LIKE A PARADISE, AND SO IN HIS STORIES IT HAD BECOME ONE.

I STOPPED ASKING MY GRANDFATHER TO TELL ME STORIES, AND I THINK SECRETLY HE WAS RELIEVED.