Chapter 4

Winter War

My name is Edvin Kivi. I have blond hair and blue eyes. I was 28 in 1939.

Snow was falling softly to the ground as if it had no clue of the utter chaos of the rest of Europe. The Nazis and the Soviets had just invaded poor Poland, and the people could not defend her. The snow reminds me of the Germans on occasions. They seemed harmless at the beginning with only a few, but after awhile, many more came. The power of all could block streets and cause havoc in even the most prepared cities. The Germans had nothing on the Soviets, though. Everyone knew of the sheer number of the Soviets that could come whether to help you or not. I had anticipated these events coming to pass, so I joined the Finnish army.

I joined the Finnish army in 1936 when I was 25 years old, and I had been laid off from my job in a local factory. I live in Kouvola in South Finland with my parents and my little sister. I would do anything for my sweet little sister, so I knew right away I had to join the army to protect her from what was to come. I wish for nothing more than to be wrong about the war starting. Being only a staff sergeant, I had very little vacation time. When the Nazis and Soviets invaded Poland, I wanted nothing more to go home and reassure my sister. My superior officer refused to give me a pass home in case of an attack. I hate him so much for being right.

Barely a month later, the Soviet army was coming in full force and took land from Finland and some important ports. Negotiations had started with our governments on what was to be done with this acquisition of my land. According to the reports, the USSR had offered to hand over some of Soviet lands in exchange for the land they had already claimed from us. Of course instead of trying to avoid more war and take the better of the two options, the Finnish government refused the offer. On November 30, the Soviets declared war on us and sent one million men on several fronts to attack us.

Though the Russians had number, they could not master the terrain in our harsh winter weather which leads to the battle being called the Winter War. Slogged down behind the Mannerheim Line, I held out from the constant bombardment of shells and small groups of the enemy soldiers trying to break through. The line was our defensive barrier in the south, and I only hoped it would hold long enough for the Soviets to realize they could not cross.

For three months, I endured the freezing temperatures, extreme wind speeds, and torrential snow fall. My job was to write the reports on conditions at my front and sent them back to headquarters. Occasionally, I would have to fill out requisitions for more supplies and transfer papers. Reports would come in, too, and one had stated that the Soviet Union had officially been expelled from the League of Nation. When I did not have official duties, I would write to my sister and my parents to see how the home front was fairing. My birthday had been in January, so I received best wishes from my family and promises to return home safe.

The defensive line we hold is remaining strong, but I feel it is too close to my home. With no help in sight either from Great Britain or France, I felt that winter was our only ally as of now. As it turns out, even our lone ally was not much help. Early on in February of 1940, the Soviets launched massive artillery bombardments along all of the Mannerheim Line. They breached the line next with a swift and powerful blow to most of the forces right on the edge. Luckily, I was working further in from the front, so no harm had come to me as of yet. The Soviets kept pushing us further inward toward the cities of my country.

Finally, we could not hold out any longer to the tireless Soviet offensive. On March 12, Finland surrendered and signed a peace treaty. The treaty received the name the Treaty of Moscow because of the Russian capital. Stated in the treaty, it gave more of the western territory of Finland and allowed the Soviets to build naval bases. I was 30 years old. I thought not even Germany could take a country as fast as the Soviets did, but I was wrong.