

Yell Out Loud

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Written for my sons, Hugo and Max,
who are smart, funny, kind and very loud sometimes.

“Tis the Dreamer whose dreams come true!”

Rudyard Kipling
The Fairies' Siege

Prologue

At 10 years old, Max Engel did not speak. It's not that he couldn't talk; in fact, he spoke quite well, but had chosen not to for the time

being. Truth be told, his vocabulary far exceeded other boys. Words like “paleontology” (the science of studying fossils) and “linguistic” (belonging to languages) came from his mouth easily. So this “not talking” wasn’t a permanent situation. Years later – sorry to jump ahead a little – Max Engel would speak four English, German, French and Spanish fluently by the time he was 25 years old. Older, grownup Max Engel, unlike 10-year-old Max Engel, would never stop talking. He had a gift for the nuances or slight differences in language. But Max Engel would not just become a linguist, one who speaks many languages. He would also become an anthropologist, one who studies ancient cultures. Using his language skills, he would spend his life teaching people about the ways of different societies and human behaviors, with a special focus on wars. But that would be later. For now, Max wouldn’t say a word, not yes or no, or even ask for his favorite cereal. He just wouldn’t say anything at all.

For the sake of the story, we won’t talk about (no pun intended) why younger Max had stopped talking – well, not just yet. Don’t worry, in time, little Max will tell you himself. This story begins after he had gone silent and how eventually he would speak again. This is a lesson about how Max Engel, by not talking to his older brother Hugo, his parents Mom and Papa, his best friends Ben and Kavan, and all his other friends, including his neighbors, Mr. Klopp and Mrs. Carmichael, learned how to listen to the people he loved and do remarkable things for them. And this is the story of how, without language or words, Max Engel and all the people around him became extraordinary. Oh, and there is a hidden treasure as well.

Chapter 1

The night the bombing stopped, and the sky cleared, was the first time in a while Max could see the stars. They were bright and flickering. The war had ended, or so everyone was saying outside. White clouds drifted overhead like cotton balls, and they made him smile. The airplanes' roar and the distant rapid gunfire had finally disappeared, although he still heard it in his memory. It had been days since Max's family had been outside their house, and the world felt calm for the first time in months. The fresh air in his lungs felt good. He didn't understand why or how the war had stopped but accepted it without question. He was 10. What did he care?

Max stood still on the lawn, listening to the cheering and car horns honking with happiness. He was a different version of himself than two years ago when the war started. Now, his skinny arms and legs poked through his worn clothes. His mother, Milla, couldn't shop for new ones with the war, and Max seemed to grow every day. Tufts of straight brown hair shot from his head in every direction, and his large green eyes glowed like moons. Dotted with freckles, Max's nose and cheeks were wide and rosy in the night air. He was tall and thin for his age but still just a boy. While people celebrated in the streets, Max stared at the stars. He had made a deal to end the war with those very stars, and Papa had said he should be a man of his word. He knew he wasn't a man yet, but still, he wouldn't go back on his word.

"Max!" Hugo screamed. "Max, Papa will be coming home!! Whooopee!!!!"

Their father, Captain Marten Engel, had fought on the front lines, managing ground troops. He had made it through the war

unharméd and their mother constantly reminded Max and Hugo that it was miracle. The boys loved their father; he was a tall, kind man, who made them homemade crepes to eat and taught them how to play soccer. He rarely yelled at them but was stern, in a good way. No always meant no to Captain Engel.

Max's older brother Hugo was a little bit taller than Max and just as skinny. Unlike Max, Hugo had clear blue eyes, like their father, and shaggy blonde hair. But he had freckles the same as Max. Now, Hugo was racing circles around his baby brother, yelping and screaming like he had won a soccer match. His hair glowed in the night like a firefly skipping across the lawn.

“Max, what ya say, Max! Isn't this awesome!” yelled Hugo. Max just nodded and smiled.

“Still not talking, eh? Okay, baby brother.” Hugo shook his head. His mother warned him not to push Max to talk. They hadn't noticed precisely when Max stopped talking. A week or so ago, while asking him questions, they discovered Max only nodded yes or no. No words would come, no matter what they asked him. His mother worried at first, but also knew little boys had a way of righting themselves, like ships. They altered and adjusted to the storms and eventually found their way. She told Hugo to be patient with his brother. He must have had a reason for not talking.

That early summer night, Max quietly watched Hugo and his mother celebrate the end of the war. He knew one thing for sure: he would do anything to protect his family. Even if it took sacrifice, it must be done at any cost. That's what his Papa had taught him.

The cool night air made him shiver without a coat. It felt odd not to hear the rumble of tanks and soldiers marching. Their shoes always stomped down on the pavement angrily. They were men not much older than Max, dressed in black or red, fighting over his country. Max didn't understand why, and his mother told him it was about their egos. Max had to look up the word “ego”; it meant a person's sense of self-importance. Mom said war made men feel significant, and then

she let out a tiny “*uugh*” sound from her mouth. It was what she did when she was annoyed, muttered “*uugh.*” She called the leaders of their country selfish. Mom said, “If people couldn’t work things out without threatening to kill one another, then they are not smart enough to be in charge.” Mom was always saying stuff like that; she was a bit of a know-it-all. She had gone to college and, during the war, wrote essays for newspapers and magazines. So Max guessed some people did want to hear what his mother had to say after all. It seemed like grownup stuff to Max, but his mother was never afraid to share what she thought, whether there was a war on or not.

He hadn’t seen Papa in six months, since his last visit from the war. When his father announced he was going to the front lines, Max’s mother got really mad. She threw a pot at Papa, but it just hit the wall. Papa explained he had no choice. He said being there was the only way to end the war. Papa told Mom she could use her words to fight, but he had to use his hands. But fighting is fighting, thought Max, same difference. Papa also said violence could be a means to an end, whatever that meant. And his mother promptly disagreed; she hated violence of any kind. But his parents loved each other, and Max heard her cry often while his father was away. He knew she missed him more than anything. He did too.

Now Papa would be coming home, and Max wished for things to be ordinary again. He wanted dinner every night with his family and to go back to school with his friends. He wanted to play soccer on a team. He wanted his annoying brother Hugo to be able to fly his own airplane, since that was all he ever talked about. If he could have all that, then Max would make whatever sacrifice he had to make so their lives go back to the way they were.