

**Fahrenehg 451**  
 A GUEST JUL 8TH, 2020 49 IN 5 DAYS

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1. "Oma? What was the war like?"
2. The older mare paused. There was a moment's hesitation before she pushed the pie she was working on away from the edge of the counter and brushed a stray strand of her yellow mane out of her face. "Why would you ask me about a dirty thing like that," the mare sighed with a quick glance towards her grandfoal. Her blue eyes made contact with the child's for just a heartbeat before darting away. "It was not like they say in your textbooks."
3. "That's why I'm asking," the foal said, with a little stomp of her hoof - not out of anger, but insistence. Or excitement. "Somepony at school was saying things -"
4. "What kind of things?"
5. "About the war."
6. "Such as?"
7. "Why we had to fight."
8. "Like?" the mare smirked.
9. The foal shook her head. "I can't say. Momma got angry when I told her."
10. "Ach, nicht gut."
11. The mare sighed again and brushed the flour off her forehooves with a shake of her legs. Most of it came free, but here and there little sprinklings of flour and kneaded dough could still be seen on her white coat. More was scattered across the canvas apron she slowly untied with her teeth and draped over a nearby stool. The foal waited patiently - as patient as a child her age could - her hooves dancing slowly in place, tapping softly on the tile floor as she waited for her granddam to free herself and turn off the oven. "Let's go to the other room und sit, little one. My back is aching from standing so long."
12. The filly nodded eagerly and followed after the mare. She kept pace for as long as she could hold herself back before darting ahead and leapt onto the cushioned sofa with a thud that rattled the back of it against the wall and drew an exasperated, if amused, grunt out of the elder pony. The filly snuggled against the far arm of the sofa, curling up into it as much as she can before abandoning it for a much more comfortable spot - reclining against her granddam's flank, staring up at the elder mare.
13. Waiting for a story.
14. "It wasn't at all like they say," the granddam repeated slowly, "und I did things that I cannot be proud of, but they had to be done."
15. "Why?"
16. "For you, my little one," she chuckled.
17. "But I wasn't even born yet!"
18. "No," the mare chuckles, "but I fought so you could be, und so you could grow up without having to do the things I did."
19. "Like what?"
20. "When you're older, my precious." The mare ruffled the filly's mane and looked down at the child with a loving smile. "All I wanted as for a world where meine children und their children could grow up free und without fear." She closed her eyes and sighed. "It wasn't that we wanted to go to war, you understand, but we didn't have a choice. It was forced on us. With all my heart I wish we hadn't been. It was terrible."
21. "But we won! We were the good guys and -"
22. The mare gently placed a hoof over the foal's mouth.
23. "Nein, little one, don't put it like that." She shook her head. "We thought that during the war, und..." She shook her head again, harder this time. More violently. As if trying to shake out the memories. "Nein," she repeats. "That makes it sound like our enemies were bad ponies, und... some were, but not all of them. If you declare yourself righteous, then all you fight must be evil, und that was not the case. Some were just trying to preserve their way of life, as we were. For them, I had nothing but respect und still do. Others were fighting us because it was their nature or because they did not agree with us - or because they were afraid. We can understand their reasons und in their place we might have done the same. I can forgive them." She poked the foal in the ribs. "As should you. Every pony - or yak or zebra or so on - should be proud of their heritage -"
24. The foal nodded. "One of my best friends is a zebra!" she announced, drawing a smile from her elder.
25. "Und a good little zebra she is," the mare agreed with a nod. "She believes in her ways but does not try to make ours hers, or hers ours. She is strong in her beliefs. Tolerance can be both weakness und virtue, with the trick being to know when is which. Her I respect, as she does us. Though we are different, our tolerance of each others' ways is a virtue that lets us both learn und grow."
26. The filly nodded again, proud of her friendship. As every pony should be.
27. "But yes," the mare murmurs, "some were evil. They wanted to destroy our civilization und enslave us. That was their goal, more than anything else, to hurt us to make them strong. Any who disagreed with them were attacked or shouted down until some ponies were too afraid to think differently. Many began to believe their ways were normal, or even progressive. Those poor ones did not see the path leading to our destruction, even as they walked down it, und they demanded we follow. When we refused, they did everything they could to drag us along. They pulled down our art und statues, told us we had nothing to be proud of. Books were mocked und burned, knowledge cast aside for being declared inherently wrong or dangerous. Even our schools turned against us to teach the next generation that they were weak, that they had nothing to be proud of, that our entire way of life was a mistake... So we fought. We put up new statues, made new art, wrote new books to replace what had been lost. We took what was left of our culture und made a new way of life, one that recognized our achievements instead of tearing them down."
28. The mare looked down at the foal and poked her again, harder this time. Hard enough the filly stiffened. Hard enough to make sure she had the foal's full attention.
29. "Und do not make the mistake of thinking we won," the mare hissed. "We did not. This is a war that cannot be won. All we achieved was a moment of peace. Sooner or later, ponies will begin walking down that very same path once again."
30. "Then..." the filly blinked up at her granddam "... why did you fight? If you couldn't win, then -"
31. "Because if I did not, then who would?" the mare snorts. "Because if I did not, then meine daughter would have had to - or even you, if it was not already too late by then. I fought because peace and our people are always worth fighting for."
32. "Then..." the filly trailed off as she searched for the right question - or the right way to ask it. "Oma, why aren't you proud of what you did?"
33. The mare shakes her head.
34. "I... I am, little one. I am proud to have fought und I am proud to have brought peace to meine people."
35. "But oma, you said -"
36. "There are some things, some individual actions I am not proud of," the mare said, her mouth tight, "und if I were to do them again, perhaps I could find a better way. Others were life und death choices, little one. I never wished to spill the blood of other ponies, but some gave me no choice. They wished to take my life or destroy it."
37. The filly nodded, though her eyes were blank. She heard the words, perhaps even understood them, but she didn't comprehend. Not entirely.
38. That pleased the mare.
39. There were some things a foal should not have to fully grasp.
40. "Und... at times..."
41. The filly waited. She curled her hooves around the foreleg her granddam put around her belly.
42. "... at times we did things I think about now und realize where some of the very same acts we were fighting against. At the time we thought it necessary. To unify our people, to keep up morale, to... to... to demonize the enemy, or..."
43. The mare squeezed the filly tightly.
44. "War is not a good thing, my little one. We did not have the freedom you do now. We could not look back in our history books und see how things played out. Choices had to be made und they were not always the right ones. But you must remember, even looking back now we cannot know how things would have played out if we had done any different. If we had lost, then we would not have the luxury of looking back now to criticize what we did. Ponies would never know of our choices or our struggles, only that we lost. Und if certain enemies had their way, that we were wrong. That we were evil."
45. "But we're not!" the filly shouted. "We're the g-" She cut short, remembering what her granddam had said earlier. "At least... we're not the bad guys," she said, softly. As if she were afraid she was wrong again. Her eyes trembled as that went from an impulse to conscious choice to an understanding of what that meant.
46. What if she was wrong?
47. Her granddam took her foreleg from the filly's belly and stroked her mane until the little one smiled - if not reassured, at least comforted.
48. "Maybe to them we were," the mare sighed. "That, I suppose, is one way to look at it. I don't believe so at all. We tried to debate, but our enemy refused to meet us with words. We tried to ignore them, but we were met with violence. They would not let us live our lives, nor would they let us allow them to live theirs and take our own path. They forced it on us in every way they could, through every means they could. We did not want to fight - what pony does? - but we were given no choice, my precious little one. In the end we rattled our sabres hoping the threat would lead them to reason where our words could not, but it only led to war."
49. The foal twisted her head one way, then another. Trying to get comfortable, but to the granddam's eyes it almost seemed like the little one was trying to see from both sides of the argument.
50. "But..." the foal mumbled "... couldn't... I don't know..."
51. "Couldn't we just be friends?" the mare giggled. "Is that what you're trying to ask?"
52. The filly nodded.
53. "It's what the teachers at school always say whenever anypony gets into a fight."
54. Her granddam smiled.
55. "For friendship - true friendship - to exist, there must be respect. At the very least an understanding. Our enemy had no respect for us. They chose not to understand us. They claimed that to understand us would be to accept evil into their hearts. And we... we could not understand them. But we had respect, of a sort. To begin with. But the more they attacked us for not being like them, the less respect we had, until we had none at all. I wish we could have been friends, little one, but... that wish would have been wasted."
56. Silence.
57. For a moment.
58. Until a certain little foal found something she understood in what her granddam had said, something she could latch on to.
59. "Then what would you wish for?" the foal asked.
60. The mare sighed and sunk back into the cushion of the sofa as she let her body relax. She closed her eyes and - for a heartbeat - thought. Not about what she wished for, but if she had been wrong. If all those dead had died for nothing, or for the wrong reasons. If the war had been worth it. If she was wrong to have respect for her enemies. If the tolerance she now had for others was the kind that would bring destruction instead of strength.
61. She thought about many things in that blink of an eye. Raised many questions that she had asked herself before and would undoubtedly ask herself again. Questions that might keep her awake that night as she sought to answer them once more.
62. But not once did she think about what she wished for.
63. She pulled the foal closer, almost on to her lap, and bent down to plant a kiss on the top of the child's head.
64. "I just want to bake pies for my little grandfilly."

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