

Silent and alone, the man sat with shoulders hunched forward over the top of the keys of the piano. He stared down for a long time before lifting his fingers to play. Paper-thin skin covered his hands, delicately wrapping his blue veins and aging bones as he worked the ivory piano keys with the same grace and skill he'd used for many years. As he played, the memories of over 80 years of life spilled from his fingertips and welled in his pale, grey eyes. His fingertips gradually began to play the familiar tune that he had once played before he had been tainted by the memories of the war. As his fingers delicately touched the ivory keys, his feet pushed gently on the pedals and the melancholy music echoed from beneath the shiny black lid of the grand piano.

He found his thoughts drifting back to a time when the prospect of death had been too close for comfort, so close he could almost feel the grip of the reaper himself.

He felt the icy wind against his cheeks and the frostbite felt like daggers stabbing his toes, making them ache inside wet socks which smelled of damp. Despite this, the soldier knew he must run if he wanted to live. The bullets sounded so close now and he could make out shapes running out from the tree line up ahead—too close. Shouting across the explosions to his comrade, telling him to take cover, he watched as the man, his friend, rounded the corner of the wall with his rifle in the air. Without warning, a loud CRACK echoed through the air towards them and the man suddenly fell to the ground, his eyes wild with pain. The rifle fell heavily to his side. He tried to call out but his voice was silenced by the gunfire and bullets around them. **Immediately, the soldier realised the severity of the situation. The damp, ruby patch on his friend's jacket began to grow larger by the second. His face drained of all colour, his body looked weak—like a wilting flower. The soldier called across but the man's eyelids looked heavy and he could only respond by slightly twitching the tips of his fingers. It was this stillness which was the most concerning. He wasn't writhing in pain, he was almost completely still.**

The soldier knew in his gut that the other man's wound was too serious to survive and he had to do something. Dropping to his knees, he took a deep breath to steady his nerves. As the battle raged on around them, the soldier crawled out from behind the wall, whispering promises and words of calm to his fallen friend. He could see the man was fading and he could hear the wheeze in his laboured breaths. The soldier reached his friend and scooped the man into his arms, watching helplessly as the life slowly escaped his limp body. As a solitary tear rolled down his cheek, he wondered whether there would be somebody there to and hold his hand when the time came.

The change in the music woke him from his memory as his fingers subconsciously began to play something different. He let out a deep sigh, remembering the ghosts of his past and the sadness in his life which had helped to shape him into the man he was today.