

The C-Note rang out, sharp and resounding in the cool fall morning air. The deadened leaves crunched under the soldier's large black boots as he pressed his finger firmly against the piano key.

The soldier was not a soft man, hardened from years in the woods, patrolling for and ruthlessly executing rebels. He would find himself with blood on his hands and a body at his feet, never quite remembering the exact details of how he got there. His days blending together, it was difficult to tell day from night as the soldier wandered through his lonely existence.

He pressed the keys firmly, although tentatively at first, the joys of a past life somehow illuminating his eyes. His scarred and callused hands slowly began to move faster across the keys, moving with the muscle memory he had acquired in an easier life, when he was just a boy. His hands slowly became the fragile, elegant, unscathed hands of a young child. The heavy weight of his gun disappeared from his back, his camouflage gear turning into his old crisp and clean Sunday clothes. He looked over his shoulder and saw his mother standing there, tears in her eyes and smiling at him, urging him to continue. She loved him dearly and his music had always brought her peace.

Suddenly, what resonated as a sharp note in his mind jolted him back into reality.

This reality, when able to sneak in, was one of danger. He was an easy target for rebels, standing distracted in an open field, completely exposed. He despised his reality and preferred to sink back into his own thoughts. As the years passed, the line between reality and maddening became no longer distinguishable.

He started playing again, craving for the same joyful feeling to come back to him. The joy of his life before this damned war took everything he had ever loved. The joy of the days when he would awake with a clear mind looking forward to what the day would bring. A life filled with love, laughter and family. His hands tenderly stroked the keys, creating a beautiful melody. He once again underwent the transformation, this time taking him before an audience. He looked up and saw his family and friends staring back at him, their faces filled with the beauty of his music. He continued to play, without mistake. He felt like he could stay there, playing forever, basking in the glory of his music and the audience's adoration. He thought that this must be heaven, a much better place than his world of blood and sorrow. But his music could be sorrowful as well he noticed, just now paying attention to the depth and sobriety of his notes. His music represented layers upon layers of feelings that needed to be peeled back one at a time. Feelings of joy and sorrow, happiness, fear, regret and disappointment, amongst others could be depicted throughout. His senses were alert now, paying attention to every detail.

Once again, he felt the weight of his gun and his gear, as the soldier was pulled out of his deep immersion by a quiet crack behind him. He could feel the burn of his skin as the tears streamed down his cheeks. He turned and saw the barrel of a rebel's gun pointed at his head. An endless black tunnel that he knew brought nothing but blood, despair and death. He could see the bullet as it was propelled from this darkness. He did not feel fear, but comfort and resignation. His face still moist with tears, he turned to play the piano one last time, smiling now and as he fell to the ground, the music continued to play.