

# The Piano

As I sit at my old piano, my fingers gently touch the keys and the room is filled with a familiar, sad song. The song waltzes slowly and sadly around the room, filling it with ghosts and memories of the past- my past.

I think about James. I remember James so clearly. However, I do not remember what happened exactly. The bits I do remember are a blur. There were many colours and shouting, strong hands and loud voices. In addition, of course, the guns. The deafening, never-ending sound of gunfire, pounding, pounding, pounding through my skin. My heart begins to ache as I remember how it felt when I helplessly held him in my arms. If only I had not hesitated, if only I had got to him in time, if only he had stayed hidden from the enemy, then he might still be here with me now.

I remember... the battlefield was like an orchestra of loud, horrifying noises- non-stop gunfire, explosion after explosion and the shrieks of grown men crying out for help all collided together making a dreadful, terrifying racket.

James and I had stopped briefly to take cover behind a wall. I caught his eye and he managed a weak smile, which brought me some comfort even in the conditions. We would get through this just as we had got through all other battles together. The enemy were so close that we could almost feel them breathing down our necks. My heart thumped against my ribcage and fear gripped me firmly, refusing to let go.

I knew we did not have much time. I knew we had to move and James knew it too. He stared at me, his face demanding with concentration, waiting for my signal.

There was no time. It was now or never. He had to go.

James trusted my judgement. I gave him the nod and without hesitation, he went.

An ear-splitting bang. Confusion. Another bang. Panic. Another bang. A flash. A scream.

James.

He lay frozen on the floor, his body almost lifeless. Desperate, confused, shocked, I sprinted over to help him. He could not die, not now, not after everything we had been through.

I scooped him up in my arms and held him close to me. His blue eyes that were once full of life and mischief were now cold and black like the winter sky. His lips opened. "Go. Go now. Save yourself," he whispered weakly.

I did not have time to say goodbye. I did not have time to say or do anything but hold him tightly in his last moments. As I felt his body become still and heavy, a wave of misery

began to flood through my veins like poison and my whole body was filled with uncontrollable agony.

However, a voice began to echo over and over again in my head. "Go. Go now. Save yourself. Go. Go now. Save yourself..."

I had to move. I had to leave him. I had to get out.

I had to do it, for myself, for James, for the family I'd left at home. Feeling sick and breathless, I moved, I left him there and I took cover.

Now, whilst I sit at my old piano, the song slows down, drawing to a close, and I think about what happened. I think about how I came home to my family, but James didn't. I think about how I met my beautiful wife and had beautiful family, children, grandchildren- but James did not.

I think about how it could have been me. What if it had been me, not James?