

The Wooden Soldier

"Attention!"

A boy drew his hand to his forehead in a salute, puffing his chest out proudly. His father's lips pulled back into a tired smile as his gaze was averted from his newspaper.

"You're gonna be a great soldier some day, bud. I can feel it."

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The same boy looked down at the hand-carved wooden figure in his grasp, before clutching it to his chest, where it would forever be held.

"I love it Papa! I love it!"

His father smiled. "I'm glad."

The Man fingered the piece of his heart in his pocket. With his father dead, this was all he had left. The truck jolted violently, but he remained in his place, far used to the rough terrain by now. He ignored the meaningless chatter of the other soldiers, his eyes trailing to the clouded window where he eyed the endless, featureless, powdery road; the road to their end.

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Knees skidded along the green carpet, mud spluttering over his beige shorts and his crisp, Sunday school shirt. His mother would surely scold him later; however, this fear was the furthest thing from his mind, as he clicked his tongue in an authentic gun firing noise, squinting over his poised hands. There was no enemy left undefeated, no territory unexplored.

His soldier watched from his shirt pocket.

It's funny how children refuse to live in reality. Maybe that's what makes them so charming, so innocent.

"Move out!" He mindlessly crawled after the rest of his troop, the earth's blood staining his military trousers. His wooden soldier felt heavy in his pocket, the only reassurance in the world of war and violence.

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"Mama! Mama!" Tears streamed down his face as he held his soldier's detached leg in his trembling hand. His mother stroked his hair soothingly and pressed a kiss to his glowing cheek.

“Looks like this soldier’s been through a lot of wars, huh? I’m sure your Papa will have some glue in his old drawers. Let’s go have a look.”

The Man stared down at his new wooden leg. He blinked back tears, looking down and studying the figure in his hand, and the dents and scars in his papery skin. He never thought his childhood dream would shatter into a living hell.



The ground was littered with bodies. An acrid stench of blood swarmed the air, stinging to the eyes. The humid air was suffocating, once prideful uniforms clinging to moist skin. Rain drowned the sorrows of the survivors.

Among the bodies, the dead dreams, the brave, the proud, and the fallen, was The Man. He was hoisted into the arms of friends, limp and stiff, and rolled onto a stretcher of worn cloth.

Speckled with tears and blood and broken earth, and left behind; it was here the first wooden soldier lay, having served his time until the very brink, just like his Master.