



The Reflections of War

By Matthew Parslow

(Age 14-18 Category, Aged 15)

Gingerly holding the fragile picture frame in my hands, I look out through the crooked window of my lodgings. To the eye, Wimborne is very much the same as it was four years ago, save the lack of flowers, but the atmosphere has been warped. Where there was singing, only silence. Where there were smiles, only sadness. Society has turned to solitude. The soul has been sucked from our town.

Glancing at my hand, I see where the ring should be. They said the war would be over by Christmas, that we would be married by the summer of 1915. Yet, two years on, I sat at the photograph, recently damaged at one corner, into his eyes.

Staring back at her, I gently caress the image with my fingers. Men rush around me, grabbing helmets, grasping weapons. I am at the centre of this black hole of war, a void that should be closed, but still claims lives by the day.

The Lieutenant gives an order, and everyone scrambles up out of the trenches, like greyhounds sprinting on the track, whilst far away, the Field Marshals place their bets. Tucking the photograph away, I promise her with empty worlds that I will return. There's no guarantee of making it back.

A burning inferno of rifle fire engulfed the battlefield, crackling as if the flames of hell were licking at our ankles. Charging towards the haphazard hedge of crudely strewn wire, I raise my weapon and take aim. The sounds of my shots are lost in the storm of the war, but for certain I feel the bullet that rips into my shoulder. Scream. Slump. Silence.

Stepping out into the Square, I keep my head low as a scrawny prisoner of war jumps from a truck. Quickly surveying his surroundings, the man staggers towards me, an injured bird desperately struggling to catch its prey. Backing away, I feel him rip the picture frame from my hand, before the driver jumps out and beats the man, shoving him into the truck once more. They

move away despite my desperate pleas, the last remnant of my stolen love taken by the enemy.

Two days later, I find myself staring at the unforgiving cage of Dorchester's prisoner of war camp. Cautiously approaching the perimeter, I see men trapped like animals. My love is trapped by the war itself. I find the picture crumpled and discarded. Scooping it up lovingly, I run, but I know I cannot escape the world.

I awake in a prisoner camp, alone, trapped and broken. Before long, however, I am joined by a German officer whose eyes try to pierce my mind. Failing, his mouth opens to interrogate me. My brow furrows. I am the only soldier there ranking private. For this reason, they have taken me from the battlefield. Seizing the opportunity before the door closes, I kick the officer down and charge out, running before the guards can realise, react.

Back in Wimborne, I am confronted by the woman from next door. She claims that I have stolen her rations. I tell her I am not like the war; I don't steal that which people need or love. I attempt to calm her rageful thunder as locals surround us, but she will not listen. As the bell tolls one and echoes across the Minster Green, she darts towards me and rips the picture from my hands, tearing it in half. Somebody shouts at the neighbour, but it is irrelevant now. I weep as the halves of my betrothed's face fall to the floor like a life lost.

As I approach the edge of the camp, my way is blocked by a single officer, levelling a rifle at my chest. He unleashes torrents of insults at me as they draw near like hounds around a fox. Behind me, I hear the gong of the camp proclaim the hour of one. The officer fires, his bullet ripping through the air, tearing in to my heart. I collapse to the ground, a single tear rolling down my cheek, the last I shall ever cry. Another prisoner berates the officer, but it doesn't matter. Again, a darkness envelopes me, but whereas the war may end, my death is certain. We will reflect no more.

Singing has returned to Wimborne Square. Flowers bloom, yet my heart has wilted. Some families have their men back. All I have is a tearstained envelope on the mantelpiece. Perhaps their war is over, but mine will never end.