The Veteran in the Park

As usual the park was busy; mothers and their children, retired couples and office workers from the adjacent office blocks enjoying their mid-morning break. The old man sat on the park bench alone. The sun peeked out from behind a cloud and a light drizzle fell. Droplets of water trickled down his Royal Hussars hat. He didn’t move. He just sat there.

His mournful eyes reflected the memories of a distant battlefield. Like black mirrors those eyes seemed to reflect memories of a haunted past. His mouth was neither sad nor happy but resigned; like a true soldier he hid his emotions. War medals were regimented across his chest, like soldiers on parade. These symbols of honour and courage were polished to perfection, each simple in shape but big in meaning.

The red rose-coloured jacket was heavy and weighed his frail body down. It was too much to bear just like the memories are too much to endure. A faded tattoo with scratchy lines of ink appeared as the old man tugged up his jacket sleeve to check the time. The corners of his mouth dropped when he realised it was only mid-morning.

There he sat, his soft wrinkled hands gently holding each other. Only hand left to hold and the only human contact he will enjoy.

The clock struck midday, a signal that he had successfully managed to fight another day. It was time for the old man’s lunch so he packed up his belongings and slowly, with great effort, heaved himself out of the park bench, reached out for his wooden walking cane and staggered off on the journey home. The cane hit the concrete like a rhythm of sad echoing heartbeats.