

Graffiti

By James O Regan

It was a bright autumn day, leaves browning under the sun, who's rays were providing little heat in the freezing atmosphere. Leaves fell off of the oak trees, who were packed together in the large deciduous forest, and created a sea of warm colours on the forest floor. A small stream wined its way through the forest, struggling for space to roam free between the trees. A few kilometres down the stream, lay an old concrete bridge, abandoned, desolate since the First World War. Below that bridge, unknown to the world in high green wellingtons stood a boy.

The boy had been coming to this particular spot for nearly his whole life, and knew nearly every inch of every tree, every stone, every bush, and the bridge. This time was different. The boy carried cans of spray paint, waving them around carelessly and clumsily. This was his new hobby, according to his parents, which they hoped was "just a phase."

However, like everyone, no one can know every inch of any forest, with their almost endless secrets. Below the bridge, under the bank of the stream, unknown to the boy, lay an old bunker for bombings that was used to protect from gunfire and bombings in the war. The circular metal hatch had been covered over in years of oak leaves falling and breaking down, now in the form of a thin patch of mud and crisp autumn leaves.

The boy whistled, painting what he thought to be waves in the ocean, but were unrecognisable due to his lack of skill. He swung his arm across again and again, painting curvy blue lines, which could be mistaken for hills or even weather fronts. A click then sounded out, so loud in the desolate forest that it could be heard kilometres away. The boy froze in his painting for a couple of minutes, and thought nothing of it. "Probably just one of my cans" he thought half-heartedly. He then turned around to see the ground had been raised a by a quarter of a meter over by the bank. He used his wellingtons to their advantage to slowly trek across the stream

towards the mysterious raised bank. He reached it, and jumped on the bump to try and level it out again, as it was causing him some annoyance to see it not levelled out. Another click roared into the desolate forest as he landed, leaving him frozen again. This time, he reached the conclusion that it was the mysterious bank that was clicking, and thought nothing of it again.

The boy returned to his clumsy work, painting over his last efforts because even he could see the shocking effort he'd made. This time, he painted in red, and started to paint a war scene, with some inspiration he'd gotten from the bronze, rusted plaque on the side of the bridge. This time, he was more careful in his art, painting slowly and carefully. Soon after he had started painting, there was a sound of a generator or an engine whirring softly, he couldn't tell. He again, thought nothing of it.

His graffiti was now coming into place nicely, with soldiers fighting, blood coloured and battle hardened. An idea crept into the boy's mind to paint a soldier lying dead in the middle of the battlefield. As soon as the red paint left the bridge's stone cold concrete wall, the painting of the soldier finished, sounds of leaves falling and crushing deafened the forest. The boy, used to these random sounds at this point, thought nothing of it and stood back and admired his work.

The boy then thought, full of curiosity, "Why don't I see what that was. I need a break from painting". The boy turned around naïvely, and saw a mysterious lift with an open door above the ground, where the raised bank had been. His heart sank.

The boy whipped around and sprinted across the stream, icy cold water splashing his back as he struggled across it. He had seen a figure, but he was certain it was his mind playing tricks on him, but as it was approaching dusk, he decided he wouldn't take any chances. He started to hurriedly gather his things, throwing them into his sopping wet bag. As soon as he touched the red paint can, he felt a cold, wet hand touch his shoulder, freezing him on the spot, mind blank and a cold sweat forming on his forehead. A slow, deadly whisper made its way into his ear, its twisting sound waves bringing shivers down the boy's spine. It said, "What's your name,

boy?" The boy was screaming on the inside, but his body could not mirror his emotions. The whisper repeated itself, "What's your name, boy?" This time, the boy forced out, "I can't tell you that." Cautiously, the boy turned, not knowing how he was turning but obliged with his rotating body.

Slowly, the figure came into view. Draped in black, stained overalls, his face lifeless, grey and full of scars. He was holding a gleaming, deadly machete. The figure spoke, no longer in a whisper, but a sharp, high tone of voice, "You will never disrespect my soldier again." Before the boy could answer, the machete dragged across his throat, drawing screams from the boy's body in desperation, which were built up over the course of the interaction. His last hope. The screams bounced off trees, bushes, the bridge, and then nothing, causing a small stir in the wildlife. The boy shuddered, and then lay still.

As the evening drew on, the figure sat there, motionless. Only the cries of birds and the odd rustle in the trees were the only things causing a disturbance in the forest. Eventually, the figure drew a small jar from his pocket, and walked over to the boy's body. He opened the jar, and collected the aging blood from the boy's throat. He then struggled across the stream, just as the boy had done a matter of hours ago. He then started painting on the underside of the bridge, stroking his gloved finger along the cold concrete with the boy's blood. He glanced back and forth between the boy and the wall, taking care with his work, until finally, he took a step back.

A single tear streamed down his lifeless eye. He admired his work solemnly, the boy with a slit throat, next to his dead soldier, which had been painted by the boy.

The figure, then stepped over the boy, and whispered to the graffitied wall, "Thank you, soldier."