

War

Once, in an age of war and rage, when I was but a young page,
Learning trade day by day on the coastal road of Charles Draught,
While I worked, setting up shop, a curious visitor fate then brought,

A man of obvious mettle, in the corner he did settle,
In the corner he did settle, and I went with the kettle,

A normal customer, I thought.

Bedecked in uniform he stood, on his back a rifle of oaken wood,

A serious, stately soldier, with an air of quiet order,
From his pocket he then brought, a compass from silver wrought,

There I watched him stand, staring intently at his hand,
Against the wall he did stand, with an expression of naught,

His eyes lost deep in thought.

And at last from the dial his eyes tore, and into me they did bore,

A calculating glance, exclusive to those who fought,

And when he spoke, only one word I caught,

“Food” he muttered, and then collapsed with not another word uttered,

I stood in shock, thoroughly distraught,

No ordinary customer, now I thought.

Light shone through the window, reflected by the powdery snow,
Illuminating the premises of the trade that I was taught,
A trade whose abnormalities were meant to be naught,
Then my confusion subsided, and I swiftly decided,
That food would end the oddities, and was the course to be sought,
Alas, it was another naïve thought.

Now whoever has heard tell, of an old veteran who fell,
And last he did tell, a young man the sole desire that he sought,
And stranger still, when the young man obliged, the soldier opened his eyes,
And from the kettle, not the cup he took a long draught,
Now I was most unsettled, by the way he battled,
Battling with fork and knife, deftly he fought,
No manners of a soldier I thought.

After his appetite did come to an end, he referred to me as a friend,
And shared tales seemingly without end, of all the battles he had fought,
He was a soldier from the battles to the west, between the English and French,
He told of his miraculous survival in the heart of a trench,
And of all of the young recruits he had taught,
He gazed off, once more lost in thought.

He then told of the warring, his soul now outpouring,
As grief struck him within, stirring his core,
“The lake stained red from shore to shore,
Bullets and blood, an endless pour,
Silencing my comrades, forevermore.”

“Victory we claimed, yet many died or were maimed,
But we did win the war,” a smile, and tears began to rain,
His eyes, empty and bleak, searching for some semblance of valour,
His eyes red and puffed as the first tears hit the floor,
He was not a soldier any more.

And still the war lasts, within those who fought,
And until the end I will remember what he thought,
I remember the tears of my shattered friend,
The soldier with wounds that wouldn't mend,
And I wonder what any war has ever taught.