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Passchendaele

By Paul Gross

- Everybody good?
- Yeah.
Oh, Jesus! Jesus!
Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!
Hey! Hey! Hey!
Keep your head down.
Look at me.
- You're going to be okay.
- Where's he from?
13th skirt.
I thought the Black Watch
were up around Hill 60 or somewhere.
- What the hell's he doing here?
- Must've lost his head.
Must've lost his head...
- They in there, Sarge?
- They would seem to be.
Who the hell would put
a gun nest in a church?
Up round "Wipers" they put
one in a bar.
- Think about that.
- Alright, listen up.
Highway, you and Skinner,
you work your way up that side.
Peters, you come with me.
We cover. We lead.
Everybody ready?
Okay...
Let's go.
Skinner!
Drag him out of there!
Goddamnit!
Stay here.
Keep your head down.
No, please don't. No...
You're gonna be alright, Highway.
You're gonna be fine, Skinner.
Give me your dressing.
- It's okay.
- Ah, Sarge...
Stay down! Get your head down!
This is kind of funny, eh?
For God's sake, Skinner...

Momma... Momma...
You're gonna be okay.
I'm gonna get you out of here.
Leave your rifle.
Get in behind me.
- I'm going home.
- What are you doing?
- Halt!
- Get your hands up!
Wait! He isn't doing anything.
He's just clearing his pack.
No, no! Wait!
- Wait! Kamerad! Kamerad!
- I'm going home!
No!
Kamerad?
Let's go, double line!
Bombers over here,
gunners on the flanks!
Hey, we got a live one here!
- Where's Highway?
- He went that way.
Shh...
It's alright now.
You're alright now, Sergeant.
You're back home.
You're safe.
You know, they have these
birds of prey over there.
They call them kestrels.
And every time I look at you
it's like I've got one...
...banging around right in here.
You're a patient, Sergeant.
It's a common feeling.
Not to me it isn't.
I don't even know your first name.
I'm not allowed to tell you that.
I know.
You should go back to sleep.
I don't sleep.
Then how can you
have these nightmares?
I don't know.

Good night, Sergeant.

Good night, Kestrel.

What?

I think I should take this
opportunity to underscore...

...the elusive relationship
between desire and social order.

- You're crazy, aren't you?

- Crazy for you.

David?

- David?

- It's McKinnon.

Yeah, yeah...

Oh no...

No, David.

- It's okay.

- David?

- David?

- Just breathe.

You in yet?

David?

Are you okay?

Let's go.

Hello there, Mr. Harper.

- Hello?

- We're in here.

- David?

- Mr. McKinnon.

Didn't show up for work
this morning. Third time this month.

Sarah here tells me
you had an attack...

...of your asthma things.

That's the truth, sir. I did.

But now you're alright?

I went down to the river.

Sometimes the humidity helps.

Humidity.

Good one. That's good.

I don't know how
to put this, but this job,
I know it's just a local
newspaper and I know...
...it's not going to change

the outcome of the war or anything,
...but it's a good job,
and your father...
Well, you both understand...
...that I'm doing this
for your father, don't you?
Well, I'll just see myself out.
I expect to see you
in the morning.
I can't keep lying for you.
- I'm not asking you to.
- Were you with Cassie?
What if I was?
Friends don't get friends
in trouble, David.
What would you know
about friends?
All you've got is me
and you don't even like me.
Why do you talk like that?
If there's anyone that
doesn't like you, it's you, not me.
Is that supposed
to pass for insight?
By the way,
her dad hates me too.
- Good evening.
- Good evening, George.
Still no news?
Still "missing in action. "
It's not easy, I can tell you that much.
But I'm the Mayor.
I can't be seen to falter.
And our son has
a good head on his shoulders...
...so we remain hopeful.
Are you crazy?
I'm here to talk to your father.
Oh, hello. This is your friend.
David, isn't it?
Yes, sir. I wonder if I could
have a word with you.
- By all means. Come on in.
- No, sir...

- I don't want to intrude.
- Don't be silly. Come along.
Hello, everybody.
I'd like to introduce you
to David, uh...
Good Lord, I've forgotten
your last name.
- It's Mann, sir.
- David Mann.
I'm very honored to meet you.
It appears that young David...
...has conceived of a passion
for my daughter.
- Daddy, please!
- A passion, is it?
Well, then I'd be guessing
you'd still be a student.
And you'd be wide of the mark.
David here counts himself among
the ranks of the working men.
- I work for a newspaper.
- But he's not a scribe.
He sets type.
He's a typesetter.
But you must be 18 years old and
you're not in uniform. Why is that?
It's a medical thing, sir.
He's doing what he can.
Yes, well, he'll have
to do better than that...
...if he wants to earn
the respect of your father.
That's what I intend to do, sir,
and I'm open to suggestions.
For God's sake, son.
We're at war.
Use your imagination.
I'm sorry.
I don't know, I'm not sure
what I'm supposed to say.
There's no formula here,
Sergeant. We're just talking.
You, uh, want to tell me
about your nightmares?

They consistently feature...
...the image of a Canadian
soldier and a cross.
Why is that, you imagine?
I don't sleep, so I don't really
know how to answer that.
In 1915, in retreat outside Ypres,
German soldiers nailed
a Canadian N.C.O. to a barn door.
You were there,
were you not?
Yes sir, I did take part
in that retreat but...
...if they had time to stop
and nail a guy to a door...
...they're even better than
I already know them to be.
- Are you saying it didn't happen?
- I'm saying artillery throws soldiers...
...into positions
you can't even imagine.
A man in a trench...
...he's gonna see
what he needs to see.
Michael, you are
a decorated soldier.
Yeah. Yeah, I am.
And I received that medal...
...for sticking a 17-inch piece
of steel into a boy's forehead.
As soon as you were well
enough to walk, you went AWOL.
I went AWOL because
I received a medal...
...for sticking a piece of steel
into a boy's forehead!
This is insubordinate.
Understand your situation here,
Sergeant.
We are trying to determine
your status of discharge.
Your physical wounds have,
for the most part, healed.
Dr. Walker would like to give you

a clean bill of health, in which case...

...you'd be sent back
to the battlefield,
...stand trial for desertion and
more than likely be executed.

...I'm going to end up back
there one way or another.

Michael,

I'm trying to save your life.

I know that.

And I appreciate it,

I do, but this...

Go on.

The house...

we grew up in...

...it was at the bottom of this hill,

...and every time

one of my brothers, uh...

- Died?

- Yeah.

The telegraph guy, he'd bring
the notification down the hill...

...and my mother never got
any other news.

- After all, three of my younger
brothers - one, two, three and me.

AWOL...

And they don't say

"Absent without leave. "

They say "Missing in action,"
which to her meant I was dead.

So when that telegraph guy
came down the fourth time,

...it broke her heart.

She... she died

of a broken heart.

.Nurse Mann, please escort
the sergeant back to the ward.

.Major Nigel Bernard,
Canadian Army Medical Corps,

re:

Sergeant Michael Dunne.

Physically the patient nears repair.

Diagnosis remains
however neurasthenia,
Dr. Walker's dissent noted.
In light of his service record,
the recommendation...
...is that the soldier be
reassigned to the home front,
...possibly in recruitment,
in support of our ongoing effort.
I came to wish you luck.
It's not likely
I'll see you again, is it?
I don't want to leave.
No, that's...
That's not accurate.
I don't want to leave you.
I'm not what you think I am.
You don't know
what I think you are.
You talk in your sleep.
- I don't sleep.
- How can I talk?
You don't even
know my first name.
No, I don't. No.
And that's a hell of a thing, that is.
- Good-bye, Nurse Mann.
- Bye.
- It's Sarah.
- What?
Her name...
...is Sarah.
Thanks.
Rigor, Sergeant.
Rigor is our shibboleth.
No slight intended to
my immediate predecessor,
...but the sails
on this ship are slack.
The home front is awash
in saboteurs and provocateurs.
Odd those words
sound French, what?
Allies and all.

Be that as it may, our immediate concern is recruitment. Minimum age 18. Infantry, Service and Medical Corps: ...minimum height 5 foot 3 inches, chest 33 and one half inches. Gunners - Carmichael, remove this. Ah, yes sir! Capital asset, Carmichael.

Gunners:

5 foot 7 inches,
- ... chest 34 and one half inches
give or take, you understand.
Preference given
to unmarried men.
The blind and the deaf
are to be avoided,
...and asthmatics are
strictly ne touche pas,
...given the problems
associated with gas.
And on that note,
may I say, in confidence...
I have seen acts
of depravity, Dunne.
Kroonstad.
Human depravity.
But gas? Even the Boer
would not sink so low.
We use gas, sir.
Of course we do.
Cut from the same cloth,
you and I.
A rarefying experience, combat.
Something Carmichael
will never encounter.
Blind as a bat,
feet like a fried egg.
- Isn't that right, Carmichael?
- More than right, sir.
You saw action
in South Africa, sir?

I've studied your dossier, Sergeant.

But you can rest easy.

I have my eye on you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I present to you...

...a Distinguished Conduct Medal
winner,

...a proud member of Calgary's
own 10th Battalion,

...Second Brigade,

First Canadian Division.

Please rise

for Sergeant Michael Dunne!

- I thought he'd be bigger.

- In what sense?

- In the sense that he'd be bigger.

- Please, please.

You're embarrassing

the good sergeant.

Would all of those women who are
present please resume your seats?

Thank you.

And all those men

too old to serve,

...would you also
resume your seats?

And all the boys who are
not yet of age to serve,

...would you take
your seats as well?

And now, I ask you

to look at the men...

...who stand amongst you...

...and explain to Sergeant Dunne...

...why they are not doing
their part for their King,

...their country and their God!

Kamerad.

Eyes wide open.

Next.

- Name?

- David Mann.

What's your marital status, David?

- Single.

- And you're of legal age?
- Look, I applied before.
- Yeah, I see that.
And according to this form,
...you were rejected
because you have asthma.
Do you now have medical
clearance on that asthma?
I wouldn't be here, would I?
And this isn't Germany.
I don't carry documents with me.
You're in uniform,
but you aren't at the front.
- You have anything to document that?
- As a matter of fact I do.
They diagnosed me as neurasthenic,
which means 'shell shock,'
...which means
I'm mentally incompetent,
...and this is the paper
that proves it.
Haven't you ever
heard of patriotism?
Do you have a relative who's a nurse?
A sister or something?
And you live out
on Stewart Avenue?
Maybe.
Okay, as long
as I'm sitting at this desk,
...you will not be going to this war.
Next.
Name.
How's that feel, war hero?
You only got one arm.
Sad, ain't it?
How 'bout we get drunk?
Mikey, Mikey, Mikey!
Forget about the nurse!
There's a gaggle of women,
all free and clear,
...ready to hike up their skirts.
You want to know why?
- 'Cause you give them money.

- No, because I let them know...

...they are in the presence
of a real-life war hero.

- When did you become a hero?

- When I lost my arm.

You lost your arm

in a lumber mill.

The ladies don't know,

which is what I love about this war.

Joe. Got a postcard from Highway.

Seems like the Redskin's

back on his feet,

...and by the sounds of it, he's cutting
a swath right through London.

- That's what I hear.

- Hey, John.

Michael Dunne.

Lord God, it's good to see you

in one piece.

- Oh, more or less.

- On the house, my friend. Your call.

I'll have whatever you got

underneath the counter.

I'll be back in a second.

- Hey, Royster.

- To Dunne.

Well, well, well...

You two are so...

...jesusly rhetorical.

This man who just left,

...this man would not allow

me to serve - and why?

He's been over there. He's run Fritz

through with a bayonet.

Johnny, what's this kid

doing in here?

- Time to go, son.

- Do I smell Kraut?

- You calling me a Kraut, boy?

- You calling me a boy, Kraut?

I'm just a one-armed man.

What are you trying

to do here, kid?

Mister,

I'm just trying
to save my soul...
Hey, leave the boy alone!
Let it go, Roy.
What, are you nuts?
He would have killed you.
You know that?
You come with me.
- Thank you for bringing him home.
- You don't have to thank me.
It's, uh, a good excuse
to see you again.
- Well, thank you anyway.
- Okay.
Hey...
Do you think maybe I could
accompany you to a dance or...?
- I don't dance with soldiers.
- I could lose the uniform.
I don't dance
with naked soldiers.
I'm trying to flirt.
- And I'm not making it easy, am I?
- No.
What if I asked
your father for permission?
That would be difficult.
He doesn't like suitors?
No. My father's dead, Sergeant.
He was killed on Vimy Ridge.
Ah, Jesus.
I'm sorry.
I'm really sorry.
Good night.
Good night...
Ah Christ, that's harsh.
Lot of rum over there, I guess.
Yeah, but they water it down.
Plentiful though, no?
If there's a show on.
- Battle, you mean?
- Mm-hm.
Christ, that word's got a ring.
It's like...

It must be like top of the world.
And all the shit
these Krauts get up to!
They crucified
one of our guys, for God's sake!
- That never happened.
- Still.
No, it's a good story.
It just never happened.
Still...
You know...
I follow it.
Lot of people,
...they take it, leave it.
But me?
Every day come five o'clock
I got a paper in my hand,
...nose right to the print.
Every step you two take,
you and Highway,
I'm right there with it.
And it ain't just the liquor talking,
...but I am.
You're what?
Okay, Mikey. I am.
Okay, you're what?
Proud.
I'm proud of you.
And I'll tell you something else:
...if I didn't have this stump, I'd be
right between you and Highway...
...on the firing step,
right in the middle of it.
That'd be me.
I know you don't dance
with soldiers,
...but do you think maybe
you could go ride with one?
Did you carve this?
No.
No, it was whiskey carved that.
I ran a mining camp
up near Rocky Mountain House.
The gold ran dry about the same

time the war started up, so...

I figured I'd go sign up and...

...go get killed.

Can I ask you something,

Sergeant?

Do you think

maybe you could call me,

...uh, you could call me Michael?

Were you at Vimy Ridge?

I did attend that fight, yeah.

What was it like?

It was cold.

But we took that ridge

and we held it. Nobody else did that.

The British couldn't do it;

the French couldn't do it.

It was just us,

the Canadian Corps.

You should be proud

of your father.

I am.

And it's not common,

by the way.

What isn't?

This feeling.

Would you do something for me?

I think I'd do just

about anything for you.

Tell me about this.

Paint me a picture of it.

I'm not a painter.

I'm not all that particular.

Okay.

Um...

In this picture,

there is a river and, uh,

...there's a horse,

and there's a man sitting that horse,

...and together they ford that river.

And all these things

are in the Foothills.

And the man rides to a place...

...he thought he knew

like the back of his hand.

There's something
about this day that's different.
Why this day?
There's a woman with him.
Is this woman frightened?
You'd have to ask her.
What about him?
Well...
...see, that's the thing.
He doesn't have a word for this,
for what he feels.
All day long he searches for it,
...and it's not 'til he's sitting
next to the woman...
...and they're looking over a river
he can finally put a name to it.
You should stop.
In a heartbeat
I could fall so hard...
...but I'm- I'm not...
I'm broken... somewhere.
Quite broken.
So I'd start to think
you were stupid for loving me.
Then I'd begin to resent you
and eventually, I would hate you.
I should go.
Really, I'd...
I really rather you didn't.
I know.
I'm, uh...
I'm just gonna sit here for a bit.
You can keep that horse.
The soldier in
the modern battlefield...
...is beset with many challenges,
...most notably artillery.
Tissue damage results
from shell fragments,
...which are irregular in shape.
Wounds are therefore jagged
or, at best, unpredictable.
In the soft parts,
...wounds show deep

and extensive attritions...
...and are marked
by extensive effusion...
...of blood and/or serum.
Invariably, shell fragments
will introduce...
...foreign matter into the wound...
...making infection inevitable.
Your father wrote this. Jesus.
Pretty scary, eh?
Are you scared?
- No. Are you?
- No.
Do you want to introduce
some foreign matter into me?
Why should we wait?
Contused wounds
are vast erosions,
...large lesions...
...forming a cul-de-sac...
They are abrasions
with torn surfaces...
...and quivering
and herniated muscles.
They are doomed to suppuration...
...and are threatened
by grave complications...
...such as gangrene and tetanus.
In summary, artillery shells...
...will splinter,
...amputate, decapitate,
bisect...
...quarter or otherwise
grossly mutilate...
...the human frame.
In the worst of cases,
...a direct explosion
will obliterate the man.
The soldier will simply disappear.
Thank you.
Sergeant, you have anything
to add to this subject?
No. No, that's pretty
much what it does.

So you would agree
that artillery represents...
...the greatest challenge
to an individual on the battlefield?
Sergeant, do you agree?
No, sir. I'm sorry, I don't.
Um...
The single greatest challenge
to an individual on the battlefield...
...is trying to keep
his matches dry.
"Keep your matches dry?"
One of the wittier phrases...
...Dr. Walker singles out as
having turned his lecture into a farce.
Sir, I didn't mean.
- You have permission to speak?
- No, sir...
These are the drawings
of your machine?
They are.
- You had a diagnosis, did you not?
- Yes, sir. Neurasthenia.
And I think, we both know
what "that" means.
Your draftsmanship
is impressive.
- You're holding them upside down.
- So I am.
I'm not saying that
you're a coward, Sergeant.
I'm simply saying that I have been
keeping a very close eye on you,
...and what I see disturbs me.
You'll notice I've left out
certain mechanical secrets...
...that can only be revealed upon
payment of one million dollars.
A lovely round figure.
And what exactly will this invention
of yours accomplish?
It will bring the war
to an end in 48 hours.
Delightful. And how exactly

will it achieve that?
With this machine,
...an individual
can circle the globe...
...in exactly 15 minutes.
Sparkling.
We'll be in touch.
Thank you. Thank you.
No, I thank you!
- Thank you very much.
- No! Thank you!
The very ground we are
standing on is shifting.
Civilization hangs in the balance...
...so I offer a word of warning:
Do not plow a foreign field.
Sir, I just don't see what
this has to do with dry matches.
For God's sake, man!
We are talking about
our nation's security,
...which means we are talking about
a certain lady named Sarah Mann,
...on whose attendance,
I am reliably informed,
...you have been dancing.
More specifically,
we are talking about her father.
Her father was a soldier
who fought on the same ridge I did.
The only difference I'm aware of
is that he died and I didn't.
The only difference
you're aware of?
Carmichael!
"Martin Mann was born
in Ingolstadt, Bavaria.
"He returned
to his native land in 1915...
...and was assigned to the Second
Bavarian Reserve Regiment. "
He fought for the enemy.
The blood is tainted, Sergeant.
Ottawa mandates

that we must root out...
...the Hun in sheep's clothing,
and root him out we will.
Like a pig.
With regret our mandate
is uncompromising.
You regret nothing.
I don't expect a woman
to comprehend this,
...but our country
is rife with saboteurs.
When did nursing wounded soldiers
become a threat to the homeland?
If I'm so dangerous,
why don't you lock me up?
At the moment internment
is not under consideration.
Listen to him!
Listen to the sound of his voice!
How long has he been living
in this country?
My duration of residency
is hardly the point.
I've lived here my entire life!
I'm a Canadian!
Technically, yes.
But here's the sticky wicket.
Whereas I was born under
the sun of the British Empire,
...you, Miss Mann,
...were born under
the cloud of Germany.
We could move.
Start over. Or I could try
to find another job.
Doing what?
I don't know.
Cleaning maybe?
Cleaning...
This is our home.
These are our neighbors.
You can't hate
a dead man, David.
And where is that writ,

oh sister of mine?
Don't talk like that.
You sound ridiculous.
I don't hate our father.
He shames me.
There's a difference.
If I could kill him, I would.
He can only be killed once.
Well, I'm not
just going to sit here.
- Where are you going?
- What does it matter?
- Sarah?
- I'm in here.
Where's your brother?
I don't know.
He may have gone to Cassie's.
Or maybe our mother's grave.
He does that quite often.
I'll take that horse and go find him.
I don't think you should stay here.
I want you to go to my place.
Why are you doing this?
'Cause I fought on the same ridge
your father died on.
It might have been me
that killed him.
I know it probably wasn't,
but it might have been.
Use that door.
It's 213 Stephen Avenue.
I'll come find you.
Thank you.
You mind
if I have a word with you?
My nose...
Schmidt!
Dead German!
Wutz! Dead German!
"Mutti...
Ich liebe dich. "
Will you stop that now?
Ah, come on, kid.
Don't make me chase you.

Goddamnit!
Yah! Yah!
Shit!
Idiot! The hell's wrong with you?!
Why don't you just kill me?
I don't want to kill you,
just want to talk to you.
- You should have signed me up!
- You want to go to war that badly?
Where do you think
I already am?
Jesus! Look around you!
Everything you can see,
everything you can imagine,
...the entire goddamned
universe is at war!
And if that ever stopped,
...oh boy, that would be
the end of history!
I don't know
what you're talking about.
All I know is that you got
to draw a line somewhere.
And I draw the line at my father.
You think it's that simple?
- You don't?
- No.
No, I don't.
Lines are tricky...
There's so goddamned
many of them.
There's front line,
sap line, behind the line,
...lines you don't even know about,
lines you can't see
'til you cross them...
...but once you do, you're not fit.
You understand?
You're not fit for this world.
You live over there.
You got men underneath you.
What the hell am I doing?
Christ didn't die for our sins.
He just laid down the template.

I don't understand you.
If I have my way, you never will.
You're looking for romance, kid.
You're not going to find it
in a trench.
Get up.
I'm going to go find that horse.
Sergeant.
- Hi.
- Hi.
I found your brother,
and he's gonna stay...
...with a friend of mine,
I'm just on the corner.
Uh, you can have the bed.
It hasn't been slept in.
This could get a little rocky.
You saw the morphine.
When I was 23,
I robbed a bank in Fort Macleod.
- I don't do it every day.
- I don't rob banks every day.
After my father left, um,
I had trouble sleeping.
And there was this ready supply
at the hospital.
- I can't explain it.
- You don't have to.
I've tried everything I can
to do my part but.
But you were frustrated.
No, I understand that.
And I commend you, son.
I commend your selflessness.
It would seem
my daughter has indeed...
...picked herself a fine young man.
Present this letter
to the recruiting officer...
...and your way should be clear.
And with that, you have
my blessing on your union.
Oh, Daddy!
It tore my father in half, this war.

It just made our lives...
...impossible.
So I forced him
to make a decision.
It was them or us.
I really didn't think
he'd leave or...
...that I was sending
him to be killed...
...which seems to be
killing my brother...
All this. For what?
I killed a kid.
I killed a lot of men,
but I killed this one kid.
He had these blue eyes.
They were like water.
And I didn't have to kill him.
I wasn't scared or...
I just killed him.
I'm going to have
to answer for that.
One way or another.
Congratulations, son!
You've proven yourself
a true patriot.
Excuse me, sir.
But I can't imagine Sergeant Dunne...
...rejecting a candidate
without cause.
And this form identifies
the cause as asthma.
- Do you have asthma, son?
- Not me, sir.
There you go. Fit as a fiddle.
- But sir...
- Shut up, Carmichael!
In your encounters
with Sergeant Dunne...
...he bore no signs
of ill health, did he?
And yet he is not in the field.
Why is that, do you imagine?
He told me

he had neurasthenia.
The military is a curious
and beautiful beast.
Neurasthenia is our way
of saying that Sergeant Dunne...
...is a coward.
I've always thought that,
...way down, somewhere,
it was all about sacrifice.
Why? I don't know.
And now there's you.
If I asked you,
would you kiss me?
Ask me.
There's only one rule:
...don't die.
- What are you doing?
- I'm going.
Where?
- Where do you think?
- Oh God, David!
Please don't.
No. No.
- I won't have this. You're a boy.
- I'm not a boy!
- You have asthma!
- I'm not a cripple!
God, they can't let you...
David, talk to Sergeant Dunne.
He'll tell you not to go.
Really?
He would explain to them,
they would let you out.
What makes you think
they'd listen to him?
You think he's some kind of hero?
Is he missing an arm?
A leg? Is he blind?
Why isn't he still over there?
- I don't know.
- He's got neurasthenia!
You know what that means
in the army? The man's a coward.
- No. No, he's not!

- No, he's not?
Who do you think signed me up?
He's the reason
I'm going to war.
Oh, my God...
Gentlemen, I'm honored
to have you in my home...
...to observe this solemn
and hopeful occasion.
- I turn it over to you, Major.
- Gentlemen...
The eastbound train carries
our valiant youth...
...on the long road to glory.
May God go with them.
To the boys.
- To the boys!
- To the men.
- To the men!
- Hear hear.
This is how you raise an army?
You rake the very bottom
and find the weak,
...the young, the sick
and you send them?
My brother is just a boy!
He's not well; he's not fit!
Why do you want him?
Oh, you have nothing to say?
Nothing at all?
This isn't out of the blue,
Sergeant.
I'm not out of the blue.
I'm right here, right now
and I'm asking you:
...who will be there
to watch over my brother?
You know you can take
anyone of them.
Artillery, gas, wire, rain,
rats, the fucking bayonet...
Not one of these can you control.
The matches you can control.
You can have some effect upon them.

If you're in the middle of a barrage
...and you think a smoke
might steady you up...
...and you reach for those
matches and they're wet...
...well sir,
your whole world buckles.
It feels like
it's coming apart at the seams.
And that's not farce.
That is not farce.
I need you to sign this.
McRea?
It's my mother's maiden name.
I'm going back and you're gonna
assign me to the Fighting 10th.
You're going to try
and protect that boy?
You really are neurasthenic,
aren't you?
Cut from the same cloth,
you and I.
You know I'll track you down.
Be my guest.
Miss Mann?
Come in.
Oh, hello, Cassie.
How could anyone do this?
I don't know.
Why are you packing?
I can't find a job,
so I can't afford the upkeep.
I could talk to my father.
I mean, you're almost family.
How is that, do you imagine?
- You haven't heard from David?
- No.
I haven't heard from him either,
...which is strange
considering we're engaged.
- You're engaged?
- That's the whole reason he joined up.
'Cause my father has his 'ways'
and David had to prove himself.

- Is that why Dunne signed him up?

- You mean that Sergeant?

God, no.

He had nothing to do with it.

I- I don't understand.

He wasn't going to sign David up
come hell or high water.

I had to get my father to write
this medical thing saying.

- So it wasn't Sergeant Dunne?

- No.

It was the other one.

The British one.

Oh, my God!

I'm sorry, I... I don't...

What have you done?

What do you mean?

Your father doesn't want

David to come home.

He wants him to stay over there
with a white cross to mark his spot...

- ... for the rest of time.

- What are you saying?

"Dearest Sarah,

I'm not sure if you'll get this.

"I don't know if I'm only good
at painting these pictures,

"but I am trying.

In this picture there is a river

"and there is a horse

and there is a man sitting that horse,

"and all these things

are in the Foothills...

"And when this man

closes his eyes

"he can see a woman kissing him

"as like as to smother him.

"And this man knows

that kings may die

"and countries may crumble,

but if people look close enough,

"they just might,

as I have, Sarah,

"they just might find

something to believe in.

"I have to go now,
but before I do,
"remember that rule:
don't die. "

Hia!

Go on.

Hia! Hia!

Let him go!

Let him go!

Wait up!

Okay, sound off!

- What's in the bag, Lieutenant?

- In a minute. Sound off!

Johnson.

- Mann.

- McRea.

Here we go!

A little gift from the C.O.

A "Last Supper" kind of thing.

Let's get yourselves

together, gentlemen!

Get that bird plucked.

I need to check in with H.Q.

Ah, what is this?

Nice form. Had practice with that?

Just around the house.

You want me to give you

a hand with that?

For the last goddamned time:

I don't need your help.

Hey, MPs.

The RSM's with them.

Form up!

McRea!

H.Q.

Private McRea, sir.

Last time I met you,

your name was Michael Dunne.

April 22nd, Kitchener's Wood.

820 men went in;

174 came out.

Lieutenant Hanson,

Second Field Artillery.

Immediate response.
We were getting mauled,
Major Bingham.
Dunne here had a bullet
in his thigh.
Crawled across a field of corpses
to get us support.
Should have been a V.C.
Unacceptable.
I want a 'yes' within the hour.
- Mr. Watchman.
- Sir.
You mind having that conversation
with Lt. Maxwell?
- Outside, if you could?
- Yes, sir.
Major,
you want to step forward?
Turns out you falsified
some records.
Somewhat aggressively,
according to Dobson-Hughes here.
And he wants your head,
so... what do I do?
- You have to turn him in, Col.
- I wasn't asking you, Major.
What do I do with you,
Dunne?
I suppose he's right, sir.
Alright, then.
That's what I'll do.
But I'm not going to turn you in
to the military police.
I'm going to turn you
into a platoon leader.
And you will hold your tongue,
Major.
Maxwell will come back
to H.Q. with us and Dunne.
You're going to take over
'Number 2' platoon.
This party we call Passchendaele...
...started three months ago,
but it's been raining ever since,

...so the battlefield's
like a bowl of stew.
And the whole thing's stalled,
so the job of breaking out...
...falls to the only outfit in this entire
circus that seems capable...
...of getting anything done,
and that's us,
...the Canadian Corps.
You know they got a name for us?
The enemy?
They call us 'storm troopers. '
Major Bingham?
The assault has two thrusts.
On the right,
brigades from 2nd Division...
...will clear the village
of Passchendaele.
On the left, the Little Black Devils...
...and the 7th Battalion,
with us in support,
...will attack along
the Mosselmarkt-Meetcheele Road.
This is the assault front;
this is our support line;
...and this is battalion headquarters.
And we have three objectives:
Venture Farm,
Vindictive Crossroads...
...and Hill 52.
That's where we stop and dig in.
These are your battle orders.
You got any questions?
- No, sir.
- Well, I got one.
You were free and clear
of this freak show.
Why'd you come back?
For love, sir.
- That's a sorry bastard reason.
- Good luck, Dunne.
With respect, sir,
I feel compelled to lodge
a formal complaint!

This is no time
for personal vendettas, Major.
In case you haven't noticed,
we're neck deep in hell...
...and Currie's projecting
16,000 casualties.
The General's never
wrong so I need soldiers.
Now I'm not sure
I count you as one.
But I'm going to keep you close.
It might improve your chances.
I bow to your superior
judgment, sir.
Not sure
what I should say to the men.
- You know, sir, I didn't ask for this.
- I know.
It's funny, though.
You come all this way...
You got a light?
Aah!
We need a stretcher bearer here!
- I need a doctor!
- We all need a doctor.
Here.
Put him down here, soldier.
Oh, my God.
We have to take his jacket off.
What are you doing here?
It's what I'm good at.
And where else was I going to go?
Anywhere but here, Sarah.
Jesus.
I volunteered out of Regina.
Royster helped me.
How'd you get here?
It took me a month
to catch up to you.
It's okay. You'll be fine.
- How's David?
- Okay. He's with me.
- We're keeping our heads down.
- Oh God...

They're going to make you leave.
My shift is over soon.
Okay. Picadilly and King's Cross.
I'll meet you there.
You can go now, soldier.
Clear the truck!
We've got enough for everyone here!
Make way! Coming through!
- Fall in!
- Yes, sir!
- Are you worried?
- Yeah.
Don't be.
We're just a support company.
We won't even see action.
What about David?
If I could get you to him I would;
it's not safe past here.
But I promise you this:
I will bring your brother home.
Look what I made you
come back to.
It wasn't you, Sarah.
I was going to end up back here
one way or another.
All companies A through F,
battle muster, we're heading in!
Men, fall in!
I have to go.
Can you give this to David?
And remember the rule.
You're gonna see me again.
- All right, this is it.
- This is what?
- This is our trench.
- Where?
- Right here.
- Here?
String out.
Tudor, Crader, let's go!
Oh!
- Shit. You got any matches?
- I gave them all to you.
- What?

- I gave them all to you.
Yeah, but don't you have
like a reserve?
Well, they're reserve matches.
- Those will do.
- Okay.
Uh, they're wet too, though.
I just don't understand
you can say you don't like Sudbury...
...when you've never
even been there.
I don't have to go there.
I'm a Skin. Skins just know.
Fuck you and the stolen horse
you rode in on.
Oh! Goddamnit!
Fuck!
- This is insane!
- Yeah.
It's what you signed up for.
No. Sir.
Wrong.
I signed up to kill Germans.
No, you didn't.
You signed up to kill your father.
Hey, I've been carrying this around
since Calgary.
Your sister wanted me
to give it to you.
What the hell's wrong with me?
I haven't even written her.
And my own sister?
What if something happened to me?
How would I atone for that?
If that's what you're looking for,
...you've really come
to the wrong place.
How can you say that?
Come on, David.
Look around you.
You see any poets in this shit?
We're all in a slaughter yard...
...and there isn't a single guy here
who knows why.

No. No. You wouldn't be here
if you believed that.
I'm only here
because of your sister.

Listen to me:

...forests burn
'cause they have to.
And oceans,
they go up and down...
...'cause they have to-
I don't think we're that different.
If you want to get through this,
...you gotta start seeing it

for what it is:

...it's something we do all the time
'cause we're good at it.
And we're good at it
'cause we're used to it.
And we're used to it...
...'cause we do it all the time.
You better hang on to something.
The guns are coming.
- Everyone synchronized?
- Yes, sir.
Our assault starts... now.
Fire!
- Fire!
- Fire!
Fire!
- Fire!
- Fire!
Bore 800!
- Come on! Come on!
- Bore 800!
Bore 800!
- Fire!
- Fire!
Forward posts reporting: 7th
and Devils in No Man's Land, sir.
Fifty yards, light resistance.
Get me Division Headquarters.
I want to know if they've heard

anything further.

- Make sure the lines are okay.

- Is everyone all right?

Light?

Somebody bring me a light.

Calisse! Fucking mud, eh!

- We got a real problem.

- No matches?

Oui.

How does it look, you think?

Are we going in?

I don't know.

It's too early to tell.

Keep your head down, kid.

Oh, shit. Fuck.

- Field dressing!

- Fire crew!

- Mr. Watchman.

- Where's the fire crew!

- Stretcher!

- One second, sir.

Dobson-Hughes, you're acting 21C.

Eyes here...

Eyes here!

Come here. It's all right.

It's all right. You're okay.

Objectives consolidated, both flanks.

Field of fire 200 yards.

Venture and Vindictive have fallen.

So far so good.

So far so good?

So far so good, yeah?

We'll get you out of here soon.

You're okay. Okay.

- You're alright?

- Yeah.

Okay.

Flare sighted, S.O.S.

Devil's left flank

under counter-attack, sir.

Get me 8th Battalion.

Line's down, sir.

- Something's wrong.

- What?

Second flare sighted.
Left flank, 8th.
3rd S.O.S. flare sighted,
left flank.
The 8th is taking a beating, sir.
- Is your company ready?
- Yes, sir.
All right, Major.
In you go. Give 'em hell.
There's a runner
headed this way.
Shit.
All right, this is it, boys!
We're going in!
Check your gear!
You don't need this,
...and you don't need this,
and you don't need this coat.
Where are you going?
Don't leave me.
Jesus, please, don't leave me.
It's okay.
I'm right here.
The Devils are being hammered, sir.
There's a crack in the line.
Reload!
Goddamnit!
Where's the fucking relief?!
If you can get past the mud,
the country's quite beautiful, no?
Would you kindly shut up?
Hey, is that a hawk?
No, it's a kestrel.
- What the hell's a kestrel?
- It's a hawk.
We need some relief!
Aaah!
- They're coming!
- Here comes the relief!
It's here!
Relief's here!
It's coming, boy!
It's coming!
- Company commander. Where is he?

Dead. All dead.
Everyone with a stripe is down.
Where the hell are you going?
I've had the shit kicked out of me
for 8 straight hours, sir!
- You won't leave this position!
- Sorry.
Hey! Hey! Hey! Come on!
You can't leave us strung out here!
You're 800.
We're just a company. 60 guys.
You want me to stay,
you're gonna have to shoot me.
Beat it!
Where are you going?
- What the hell's going on?
- Don't leave!
Get back here!
H.Q.
Little Black Devils pulling out.
Situation critical.
Stress. Critical.
The Alleymen are regrouping.
- I see them.
- They're gonna counterattack.
We don't have enough guys!
Fuck!
We got what we got.
Two to a crater!
Horne, Miles, to my right!
Lewis gunners on the flanks!
- Let's move.
- Go! Go!
- Two down there.
- Get her down. Get her down.
- Let's go!
- Nothing from 'A' Company?
- Still down, sir.
Third Brigade is stalled.
Fusiliers are being routed.
Rout them all to hell.
Black Devils have pulled out.
Our flank will be open, sir.
And our whole fucking line

will collapse. Follow me.
- I want to talk to the Devils.
- Yes, sir.
Hey.
Enemy target marker!
Hold it!
That's a second marker!
Hey.
Thanks.
Bring on the hell.
Here come the guns!
- What are you doing?
- My gun's stuck! Fuck!
Horne?
Christ!
Steady! Hold it!
Hold it!
Can't shoot me.
- Too fucking many of them!
- Hold it!
- They're awfully close, Sergeant.
- Steady!
Mon tabernac!
Steady!
Steady.!
You fuck, fucking, fuckers...
Come on, come on...
Come on, come on...
NOW!
Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!
They're fucking on top of us!
Hey, we're up! We're up!
Allez, allez, allez!
I sent you a support company:
sixty men.
You pulled out a whole
fucking battalion? Jesus Christ!
Sir. Sixty men?
It's impossible.
They'll be overrun. Then we'll be
overrun. We have to withdraw!
We don't withdraw
a fucking inch!
We don't give ground,

we don't lose an objective...
...and we don't give up
a single gun!
But, Colonel, if the enemy
breaks through, we'll be in danger!
Lieutenant Hanson,
you're acting 21C.
Let's go.
Here we go.
Come on!
Goddamnit!
The whole battalion!
- When do you want this for, sir?
- NOW!
Every last one of them!
Get them in there now!
All eyes here!
They're piling up out there.
So all personnel not immediately
engaged report outside for triage.
Shoot!
Goddamnit!
Shoot the goddamn rifle!
Form up!
Form up! Let's move!
Hold the line!
Hold that line!
They're turning.
Up and down the line.
Yeah, they'll be back.
Load up.
Reload! Reload!
Reload!
- Sound off! Miles?
- Dead.
- Cahill?
- Dead.
- Horne?
- Really dead.
Mann?
David Mann?
David Mann?
- Nein, nein.
- Deutsch?

Artillerie!

Jeez...

What are you doing, Mikey?

- Cover fire!

- Cover fire!

Come on. Come on.

Get your asses moving!

- Set him down.

- Set him down.

You're okay.

- You made it. You're okay.

- Hey, they're forming up!

Give me some morphine.

- Can't get any fucking relief?

- Sarge, here.

- You need some water.

- Anybody got ammunition?

- I'm out.

- Spent.

Ah, here they come again!

- We need some relief!

- Damn it!

- 8th Battalion! They're here!

- Here comes the relief!

The whole goddamn

battalion's here!

Stretcher-bearers!

Both these men!

Battalion's in line, sir,

and the line is holding.

Objectives are secure.

Aid posts reporting

still more wounded en route,

...so let's make room for 'em.

We did it, by the way.

We took Passchendaele.

Nurse, I need an assessment

over there.

He's okay.

David's okay.

Look at you.

Yeah, look at me,

...all broken up like this.

I think maybe

you're forgetting the rule.

Mm-hm.

No, I'm just trying

to finish that picture.

But I don't think I'm all that good

at these pictures, so...

...maybe, maybe this man

could just write to her?

And will he?

Yes, Sarah. He will.

He'll sit at this little table...

And what he'll write is...

"In this picture, there is a river

"and there is a horse

"and there is a man

sitting that horse

...and together

they ford that river. "

And all these things

are in the Foothills.

I think you're forgetting the rule.

No, I'm gonna cross that river.

Michael, don't...

'Cause I have you...

Mike...

After the guns are silent

After your wounds

have healed

After those crosses

Have been planted

in all those fields

After that long boat ride

All the way across the sea

And after this train

Carries me

I will love you

After the war

Love you

For always

Forever more

I will love you

After the war

Forever

For always

And more
After your boots dry
And the tobacco's
All but gone
Along with all those postcards
You've carried
Under your arm
After I remember
All the words I couldn't say
And after this long night
Fades away
I will love you
After the war
I love you
For always
Forever more
I will love you
After the war
Forever
For always
And more
After this blackbird
Lifts up
From off your chest
And after your soul
Takes its final rest
My love, I forgive you
You never planned to die
And love,
I'll place two pennies
Over your eyes
I will love you
After the war
I love you
For always
Forever more
I will love you
After the war
Forever
For always
And more