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Forbidden Ground

By Endre Vészi

[man] I've seen countless men
come to this place.
Although their lives depend upon it,
they cannot change.
[cocks gun]
Yet others...
...are changed forever.
[explosion in the distance]
It feels like a lifetime has passed
since I swore my oath to Grace,
that I'd return to her unharmed.
They were Arthur's words.
Arthur died a long time ago.
[corporal] Make ready!
'Wilkins' is all I answer to now.
[whistle]
[cheering]
[explosions]
[gunfire]
[explosion]
[gunfire]
[gunfire and explosions continue]
[explosion]
[gunfire in the distance]
I fear that if I see her again,
she will look into my eyes
and no longer see the man that she loves.
I fear this more than the enemy.
More than death.
[soldier] Keep your head down!
[whistle]
All right, lads! Let's go!
Keep moving! Don't stop!
[gunshots]
[gunfire continues]
[indistinct shouting]
All right, lads. Come on! Gather 'em up!
- That's it! Hurry up! We don't have
all day! - Sergeant Major!
Sergeant Major!
Sir, the Lieutenant orders you
to report to the command post.
Immediately, sir.
Right. Thank you, Private.

- Thought you'd done a runner, sir.
- Make way. Coming through.
It's a bit late for that, Rich.
Wait, wait. Hey, stop, stop.
- All right.
- He's one of the lucky ones.
What's it like out there? Have you seen it?
[soldier] Sir?
The Lieutenant.
- Get the men ready.
- Sir.
Come on.
All right, lads. Come on. Gather 'em up.
- Yes, sir.
- Right away, sir.
Move aside, lads! Come on!
That's it. Make way! Good!
Sir!
Wilkins.
About bloody time.
[explosions in the distance]
Aword.
The last bombardment
didn't quite do the job.
As you can hear,
most of their defences are intact.
Did any of them make it through, sir?
No.
But I'm certain you'll have more success.
Sir, with all due respect,
a forward assault
on those machine guns is suicide.
Those are your orders, Sergeant Major.
Yes, sir.

At 21:

will be smashing the lines again,
if the Fritz still hold that trench.
Well, wouldn't it make more sense
to delay the next wave till then?
Let's save the strategy
for those who know best, shall we?
Yes, sir.
Just make damn sure you take that trench.

Any cowardice is to be punished.
Do you understand?
Sir.
Dismissed.
Corporal.
[locks gun]
I don't want any heroics out there.
You just keep the men moving.
Yes, sir. No heroics.
Can you see anything?
Good luck, Rich.
And you, sir.
Riley!
Riley, what can you see?
Riley?
Oi, O'Leary, get 'em down from there!
Oi, Frankie, get down from there!
You, too, you idiot!
[O'Leary gasps]
Christ, boy!
There's plenty of time
to get shot out there!
- [Franklin] Sorry, sir.
- [Rich] Stupid lad!
And you... keep your eyes open.
God will still hear ya!
Come on, men! Move up!
Get that man out of there!
- Right away.
- Close the gap.
Right away, sir! I'm gonna get my boy.
Out the way. Make way!
And you.
With me.
Steady now, lads.
Sir?
The lads didn't get very far, did they?
Do we even stand a chance?
It's all right to be afraid, O'Leary.
You wouldn't be human if you weren't.
Don't stop and don't look back.
You'll be fine.
[shouts] Fix!
Make ready!

Load!
[they cock guns]
[explosions in the distance]
[breathes heavily]
[whistle]
Move out!
[gunfire]
Come on! Don't stop!
[gunfire]
[explosions]
[groans]
[explosion]
[gunfire continues]
[groans]
If you can't run, shoot.
[grunts]
[indistinct shouting]
[indistinct shouting]
Frankie?
[pants]
Frankie? Frankie!
[gunfire continues]
Frankie! Frankie!
Frankie!
Get the hell over here!
Move it!
On the count of three, all right?
Three!
[groans]
Frankie!
Frankie!
[explosions]
[grunts]
[pants]
[gunfire]
[explosion drowns speech]
[explosion]
Are you all right, sir? Sir!
Are you all right? Can you hear me, sir?
Yes. Let's finish this.
[groans]
Jennings, don't!
Come on, lad. On your feet. Come on.
Jennings!

Get back here!
Jennings!
[gunfire]
[birds chirping]
[sobs]
Grace.
Arthur...
There's...
[baby cries]
[cries]
Arthur. I...
Just tell me it's not yours.
I'm sorry.
Arthur... please. I love you.
Just not enough
to keep your bloody legs closed!
Arthur, wait!
Wait, please! Understand! Arthur, wait!
[Wilkins grunts]
[gasps]
[breathes heavily]
[groans]
[breathes heavily]
[gunshot]
[cocks gun]
[gunshot]
[cocks gun]
[German soldier]
There it is again, sir. 800 yards.
[cocks gun]
[in German]
[grunts]
[clears throat]
[they whisper in German]
[pants]
Soldier.
Soldier!
[soldier pants]
[Wilkins grunts]
[soldier screams]
[they grunt]
[O'Leary screams]
[screaming in the distance]
O'Leary! O'Leary, it's me!

[gunshot]
[O'Leary grunts]
It's me. Stop it, boy.
Sorry, sir.
[flare crackles]
Get down.
[lieutenant aid] I can't see any action
on the field.
What do you suppose the Fritz
are shooting at, sir?
I haven't the foggiest.
Makes no difference.
At nine o'clock everything beyond
that ridge will be nothing but dust.
Start moving the men.
Sir.
[breathes heavily]
Get your things together.
We have to move.
I'm so sorry, Sergeant Major.
Forget about it, Private.
Frankie.
Did you to happen see him out there, sir?
Private Franklin?
No.
Such a git.
Never listened, you know,
but I promised his mam
that I'd... take care of him.
I'm sure you did your best.
He's all I've got out here, sir.
Do you think he might be nearby?
Gotta get him home, sir.
You just worry about yourself right now.
You can bet Private Franklin
is doing the same.
But, sir, what if he's hurt?
Sir, what if he's hurt or...?
Maybe he might be dead.
[O'Leary grunts]
Look out there, goddamnit! Look!
I don't wanna hear another word
about Private Franklin.
Do you hear me?

Aye, sir.
A lot of good men died today.
Now get your things.
[groans]
O'Leary...
We'll have time to mourn our friends later.
Right now, I need you on your game.
Yeah?
Good lad.
Now get your weapon.
We can't stay here.
[groaning]
- [soldier] Hello?
- Shh!
Is there anyone there? [coughs]
- Hello?
- Who's there?
[coughing]
Sir? Is that you, sir?
It's Jennings.
- Where are you?
- [Jennings coughs]
Can you move?
I don't think moving
is such a... a good idea, sir.
All right.
Hold tight.
I'm coming to get you.
Come on, lad. Let's go.
[groaning]
[O'Leary whispers]
Sir... the Germans are this way.
And so is the Corporal.
[in German]
Sir, are you sure this is a good idea?
Corporal, are you still with me?
I haven't buggered off just yet, sir.
[Wilkins groans]
Come on, O'Leary. Try to keep up.
I'm trying, sir.
[Wilkins grunts]
[pants]
Rich?
Rich.

[Jennings] I'm not that hard done by,
Sergeant Major.
Where are you?
[Jennings coughs]
Rich.
The artery is intact.
[pants]
It's still bleeding, though.
Don't worry.
It's a walk in the park from here.
[Jennings] Don't worry about me, sir.
It only hurts when I breathe.
All right.
We're going to get you out of here.
I'm gonna pull you down.
Get over the other side.
Are you ready?
[Jennings coughs]
Are you ready?
- Yes, sir.
- All right. Here we go.
[Jennings groans]
[cocks gun]
[Jennings groans]
Shh... It's all right, sir.
[Jennings groans and pants]
Here.
[Jennings coughs]
Are you ready?
- Are you ready, O'Leary?
- Yeah.
OK. Let's go.
Pull.
[they grunt]
[in German]
[they grunt]
[Jennings groans]
[they grunt]
Let's try again, shall we?
[grunts]
[gunshots]
- Shoot, Rich!
- It's jammed!
[groans]

Fire!
Come on, Rich! Fire!
Come on! Move it!
[groans]
[coughs]
[groans]
[in German]
[they speak in German]
[pants]
[Jennings coughs]
Jesus.
Well, at least we know
which way the Fritz is now.
[cocks gun]
[in German]
[pants]
[pants]
There's no way
you can drag me 400 yards through there.
[sighs] You both stand
a better chance without me.
We're not leaving you here.
[sighs]
Don't be a damn fool, Arthur.
Maybe one of us should go for help.
I mean, surely one person
stands more of a chance of getting back
than the three of us.
And then what, Private? What?
You'll bring the cavalry back to save us?
- Leave the boy alone.
- If we leave you here, you'll die.
Within the hour.
All right.
You're going to have to give me a minute.
I can't move just yet, though.
The whole bloody world will hear me.
You don't have a minute.
You always look on the bright side.
Always was your best quality!
[Jennings laughs]
You haven't changed a bit.
You have.
[breathes heavily]

Well, if I have to drag you off
this godforsaken patch of mud inch by inch,
I will.
But I'm not leaving you here.
[in German]
I don't suppose you have a deck of cards,
do you, Private?
No, sir.
I didn't think so.
It's a pity Ollie is not here.
He always had a pack.
Ollie McAlister. [scoffs]
[Jennings groans]
It's been a hard year.
Almost three.
Rich...
...do you remember who we were
when we first met?
Don't be too hard on yourself, sir.
You're the sanest man I know.
I've been out here so long...
...I can't see her face any more.
When I close my eyes,
it's just this photo that I see.
It's still enough.
It's enough to get you back home.
May I see, sir?
I don't have anyone like this
waiting for me.
I wish I did.
I'd carry a picture of my mam with me,
but the lads
would give me shite about that all day.
[chuckles]
But I know she's there
waiting for me nonetheless.
I'm sorry, Mrs Wilkins. I can't help you.
I took a huge risk coming here.
I'm not fit to carry this child.
You helped that lady from Wessex.
She had a medical condition
that endangered her life. You are healthy.
There's more at risk here
than just my licence to practise.

It's out of the question, I'm afraid.

I'm sorry. Nurse!

[door creaks]

Please, sir. I'm desperate. I can pay.

The nurse will talk to you
about your health during pregnancy.

- But...

- I have other patients waiting.

[clock chimes]

[door creaks]

Just down here.

Whoa, whoa. Wait up.

- Just wait.

- Sorry.

- Are you all right?

- Yes.

Just take a minute.

[Grace clears throat]

- OK. When you're ready.

- I'm all right.

Just take it easy.

How long has your husband been away?

My fiancé was sent to Europe

nearly three years ago.

[footsteps upstairs]

Arthur was at the Western Front

last I heard.

I haven't had a letter in over a year.

The last one I got

had so many holes cut through it.

It's enough to catch the sentiment, but...

...I can't stop worrying.

[whispers] He'd be devastated.

I can't let him suffer this.

Or you can move away,

have the child and adopt it out.

I have nowhere to go.

And if my family were to learn of it, they'd

disown me. I'd have nothing to come back to.

Just don't make any rash decisions

until you've really thought it through.

You're not the only one, Grace.

I should go.

I should go. I'm sorry.

Do you have anyone to stay with you?
It's not a good idea for you to be alone.
- I'll be fine.
- Oh, Grace, wait!
I could use some company.
[Jennings groans]
[in German]
[Jennings grunts]
[O'Leary] Sir!
[in German]
Let's try this way.
[flare crackles]
Get down.
We need to get into cover.
[O'Leary] Hold tight, sir.
[Jennings grunts]
I think... I'm in trouble.
O'Leary, give me your rifle.
Do you think you can get the other sling?
Yes, sir.
All right. Off you go, boy. Be quick.
[Jennings groans]
Sir?
What time are the big boys gonna light up?
You might be able to fool the boy,
but I've seen that look before.

21:

[Jennings sighs]
We don't have much time.
What did you tell him?
[Wilkins] He's got enough to worry about.
[Jennings] Poor boy.
Poor boy?
You know, I found him face-first in the mud
hiding like a coward.
He'd sooner make a run for it
than to stay here and help you.
Don't be too hard on him, sir.
I don't remember any of us being
particularly brave when we first got here.
Well...
He could have stayed out there,
but he's here with us.

That's got to count for something.
Besides...
...he's just a boy.
[grunts]
[whispers] Here you go, sir.
Good job, O'Leary. Well done.
[coughs]
- You look ridiculous! - I figure
it's better than no helmet at all.
All right.
I have to try to slow this bleeding.
Are you ready?
All right.
[Jennings screams]
Keep it down.
[flare crackles]
[Jennings pants]
[in German]
[they cock guns]
[shouts in German]
[Jennings groans]
Come on! Faster!
[O'Leary groans]
[Wilkins] O'Leary! O'Leary!
[Jennings grunts]
Are you all right, Rich? Yeah?
Come on! Come on!
[Wilkins pants]
[groans]
[breathes heavily]
[cocks gun]
Well, that's it. It's all over.
I'm going to get a serious rash
if I stay in these wet trousers.
[laughs]
How's the leg?
I'll live, sir.
It's just a flesh wound.
Just being able to talk about this without
someone looking down their nose at me is...
...nice.
I've seen what an unwanted child
can do to a family.
My sister.

Father only saw the shame Millie
brought down on the family.

Did you... help her?

No!

She had the baby.

He lives with a nice family in Surrey
last I heard.

Grace...

...I know why you came to see Dr Bennett.

I've seen how these procedures work
and I strongly urge you to reconsider.

So I can suffer the same shame
as your sister?

Sometimes Millie
cries herself to sleep at night,
wondering what he looks like,
what sort of man he'll grow up to be.

- But at least...

- I've made my decision, Eve.

Well...

I'm sorry to hear that.

You've seen these procedures.

You said it yourself.

- No, Grace.

- Eve, please.

You have to do this for me.

I'm not a doctor. I'm not trained for this.

There's no one else.

I know what I'm asking of you.

But this isn't about me.

I couldn't bear it if Arthur arrived home
to more pain than he endured out there.

And how much pain would you cause him
if you were to die?

Would your fiance still have you
if you were carrying another man's child?

Do you have a picture of him?

Your husband?

I hope he's worth it, Grace.

That's a hell of a thing
you did for me, sir.

All three of us
are getting out of here, Private.

Aye, sir.

Sir, I mean no disrespect,
but I can't help thinking
there's something you're not telling me.
And what makes you say that?
Every chance you get
you're looking at your watch.
Whatever it is, I can handle it.
Tell him, Arthur.
All right, then.
We failed in taking the trenches back.

So at 21:

will be smashing these lines again.
Hard.

21:

20 minutes.
We're close, sir. We can make it.
There's a medic's kit caught
in the barbed wire not ten yards away.
If we can patch him up,
we might have a chance.
All right. It's worth a shot.
Cover me.
- Are you ready?
- Yes.
All right.
[cocks gun]
[breathes heavily]
[wire snaps]
[cocks gun]
[Wilkins pants]
[sighs]
[in German]
[cocks gun]
[grunts]
[gunshot]
[pants] Well done.
[sniffs]
Sir?
Our boys must know we're out here, right?
They'll stop the bombing.
I mean... they'll have to.
I think it's safe to assume

they have no idea.

When the bombardment starts,

we'll make a run for it.

I think he'll have a better chance
of making it if we stick together.

Sir...

He'll make it.

What if it were Frankie lying here, sir?

Would you still be

risking our lives for him?

You think because the man

has his eyes closed he can't hear you?

He's 100 times the man you are!

The only reason he's here dying is

because he had the courage to do his duty.

The man was...

The man is a hero

and he's coming home with us.

[Wilkins sniffs]

I understand that, sir,

but we're running out of time.

And if what you're saying is true,

that no one knows we're out here,

then when the big boys

blast this place to hell,

we'll all be dead in seconds.

Then that's the way it's going to be.

End of discussion.

No, sir.

That's not how it's going to be.

I can go and get help.

I'll bring the cavalry back, sir.

I promise.

O'Leary! No!

They'll snipe us, sir.

They won't know he's one of us.

[pants]

I'm Irish!

[explosion]

Don't shoot!

[pants]

[explosions and gunfire]

[shouts] I'm Irish!

I'm Irish!

- I don't think so, Fritz.
- Wait!
He's one of ours.
Damn fool!
He'll blow the whole thing.
Cut him down.
Do not let him reach the trench.
- But, sir, he's...
- Cut him down now.
[gunfire and explosions]
[groans]
Arthur.
[groans]
Again!
Don't shoot! Don't shoot!
Shoot him, man!
[groans and pants]
[gunshot]
Arthur, he's almost there.
Arthur!
[screams]
[pants]
[they cough]
[in German]
[they pant]
[lieutenant] Damn waste.
Did you know...
...that they'd pulled back?
You haven't exactly
been forthcoming, Arthur.
Have I changed that much in your eyes?
I'm sorry. That was out of line.
I shouldn't have told him.
You did the right thing.
He deserved to know, Arthur.
He died for something he believed in.
Don't kid yourself, Rich.
The boy died for nothing.
What do you believe in, Arthur?
I don't know what's
honourable any more or...
I don't know why I'm here. I just...
I just know that I wanna get back home...
...and I wanna be the same man

I was when I left.
[door creaks]
Are we alone?
Yes. I gave the servants the night off.
Are you certain this is what you want?
Grace?
Are you ready?
[groans]
How are you feeling, Rich?
I'm not feeling any pain,
if that's what you mean, Arthur.
Well, that's a good thing.
I'm going to have to
do something about this.
It might sting a little.
I feel like I can still wiggle my toes.
That should keep it clean.
How much time do we have, Arthur?
We've only got a few minutes.
If we can get back to our trench
or at least what's left of it...
...we might be able
to hold out through the attack
and then we can make for the comms line.
OK.
Let's get home, Arthur.
Come on.
I need your help. Can you do it?
Yeah.
[they grunt]
[German voices in the distance]
What is it, Arthur?
It's gas.
[Jennings grunts]
[Jennings coughs]
[Wilkins pants]
[coughs]
I'm sorry to have to do this, Rich.
All right.
[they inhale]
[pants]
[Wilkins pants]
[they sniff]
[in German]

[they pant]
Pfft! Are you OK?
- [groans] Yeah.
- Come on.
I think you're gonna have
to ease up on the coffee, Arthur.
I promise next time it'll be rum.
Next time you can smell my piss!
You're going to have
to do this part yourself, Rich.
I'm right behind you, sir.
Lose the webbing.
Here. Take this.
[grunts]
Come on.
[grunts]
[grunts]
[German voices in the distance]
They're advancing.
- [shouts] Sir!
- What is it, soldier?
Sir, the Fritz are out there.
They're sweeping the field!
[Jennings grunts]
Be quiet.
All right.
You're OK. Move. Go.
Go, go, go, go, go! That's it.
- We have to get out of here.
- All right, all right.
That's it. Go. Come on.
That's it. Come on.
[Jennings grunts]
Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.
Excuse me, sir.
Sir, the Fritz are on the field, sir.
Arthur...
I need you to do something for me.
I need...
I need you to take this message for me.
You'll deliver it yourself.
Arthur...
- Just keep your mouth shut.
- You've got to get out of here.

Now, play dead, Corporal.
[footsteps approaching]
[speaks in German]
[sniffs]
[speaks in German]
[screams]
[they grunt]
[explosion]
[in German]
[gunfire]
[they grunt]
Get down!
[explosion]
[grunts]
[explosions]
Let's get out of here.
[explosions]
[groans]
[explosions]
Is it over?
[Eve sobs]
[Wilkins groans]
Just hold on.
[explosions]
Eve...
Eve, Eve...
I can help.
Tell me what you need.
Tell me what I can do.
[sobs] I'm so sorry.
No.
[Grace sobs]
[Jennings grunts]
Are we in London yet, Arthur?
You're nearly home.
Not long now.
Thank you.
You can fix it.
You... just have to try. I can help.
I can help you.
[sobs] Eve...
You know, all things considered...
...today's been shite.
[sobs]

He mustn't find out.
[they sob]
Don't let him find out.
Get home to your wife, Arthur.
There's someone waiting for me.
[explosions in the distance]
Tell her...
...that I...
[Eve sobs]
Goodbye, Rich.
[footsteps approaching]
[cocks gun]
[gunshot]
[indistinct chatting]
[keys rattling and door creaks]
[keys rattling]
Two minutes.
[door slams shut]
Are you Eve Rose?
Yes.
My name is Arthur Wilkins.
I was Richard's friend.
He died in my arms.
He asked me to give you this.
His last thoughts were of you.
He said, "Tell her I love her."
[Eve gasps]
[knocks on the door]
[guard unlocks the door]
He was a good man.
[sobs]
[birds chirping]
[Wilkins] My dearest Grace...
...it's a strange fate
that brings me home to you.
Yet denies the reunion
I've so longed for...
...and equally feared.
A close friend reminded me recently that...
...a faintest memory
is enough to give you hope.
It's enough... enough to get you home.
And he was right.
Grace...

...I can't begin to describe the horrors
that I've seen.
But that's not an excuse.
Not for my absence
when you needed me the most.
Well, I've...
I've learned a lot about myself
these past months.
The hardest lesson to come to terms with...
...is why I lost you.
[sighs]
I love you, Grace.
I will always love you.
I will always be your Arthur.
Goodbye, Grace.