

THE REMNANTS

Written by

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1916 Ext: Canadian trenches, near Arras, France - DAWN

In single file two infantry NCO's push their way down a trench past a long line of anxious soldiers.

DAN PULBROOK (23) is in front. He's definitely not a recruiting poster for an Sergeant-Major of an infantry regiment. His uniform fits poorly and his gruff nature causes both fear and respect amongst his men. Sergeant Mitch Wilcox (24) is his best friend and trails tightly behind him. He's taller, better turned out but just as angry.

MITCH

Right into the teeth of it! We are going to take a real shit-kicking this time, Pully. No doubt about it.

DAN

If they can ever get that damn artillery coordinated maybe we've got a chance for once.

MITCH

For all I've seen those dipshits couldn't organize a piss-up in a brewery.

Dan stops and wheels back hard to face him.

DAN

Ok wiseguy, stop it right now and that's an order! You heard the captain, if we don't get up there and reinforce those Aussie troops this whole damn line will collapse. And none of these guys have a friggin' chance of gettin' back alive if we don't lead them. So, we've got no bloody choice in this Sergeant. Now let's just get the hell on with it!

Mitch pauses, hangs his head, nods quietly then passes Dan a cigarette.

MITCH

Ok, Pully, I'll play ball.

Dan lights a match for Mitch and then lights his own cigarette.

MITCH:

Any news from your lovely Rose? I bet she's spittin nails cause you ain't written in a while.

Dan exhales slowly.

DAN:

Naw, she won't be too fussed. She knows I ain't much of a writer.

He grins and looks at Mitch.

DAN:

Besides she's too busy stichin' those glamorous new duds of yours!

Suddenly a soldier's voice screams from down the trench

SOLDIER:

TAKE COVER!

Across the length of the trench men dive down into the mud as a Fokker biplane sweeps above them firing its twin machine guns down into the line. In less than a minute the German has left dozens of torn bodies in his wake and destroyed most of their equipment. The aircraft then climbs and banks to the left to prepare for another run at them.

Dan and Mitch are pressed down behind a pair of large wooden crates. They scan the devastation around them. Three boys in a machine gun emplacement have been ripped apart leaving their position shredded. Dan stares at the remains of the targeted gun.

DAN:

Goddamn it! He really tore the crap out of us.

Another soldier calls out as he aims his rifle to retune fire.

SOLDIER #2:

HERE HE COMES AGAIN.

More panicked rounds of rifle fire follow as the men scramble to find any possible protection. Dan leaps up and yells at Mitch.

DAN:

Gimme a hand.

Dan and Mitch charge up the slope toward the battered machine gun pit.

Dan shoves aside two bloody corpses, lifts the smoking machine gun up from its smashed tripod and cradles it across both arms. He yells to Mitch as he turns to face the charging enemy aircraft.

DAN:
Grab that belt and feed me!

Firing continuously the pilot levels the nose of the plane and stalks the line again. The trench erupts with terrified screams of men jostling for cover. Dozens more fall before he pauses his fire momentarily and then drops directly down toward Danny and Mitch.

Dan hoists the gun up across his left arm to try to gain a site on his target. Mitch raises the ammo belt and braces to keep it straight and level.

The pilot's face is briefly visible from the ground as the gunfire creeps closer. Dan holds his breath and pulls the firing lever with this right hand while the hot barrel bounces against his chest.

MITCH:
Get him Pully. Get that murderous
son of a bitch.

Three short bursts of flame bark from the machine gun as Dan tries to follow the path of the plane. The fighter races past them and begins to lift up again to prepare for one more pass.

Suddenly, in the middle of a long banking turn, the aircraft shakes violently and the engine begins to sputter. A torrent of black smoke pours back into the cockpit. The plane stalls and begins to twist wildly down to the ground.

MITCH:
You did it Pully! You fuckin'
nailed 'im.

From beyond a cluster of tents the blast of a muffled explosion is followed by a trail of smoke. Dan drops the smoking gun to his feet as Mitch pounds on his back and yells in his ear.

MITCH:
You did it you crazy son of a
bitch! You got that stinkin' Kraut
bastard!

Dan groans as his eyes fall shut and blood spurts down from his shoulder. He collapses, blacks out and hits his head on the fallen gun as he falls.

Mitch hovers over him as he yells down the trench.

MITCH

MEDIC. Get a fuckin' stretcher over here. RIGHT NOW! MEDIC.

(looking down)

Jesus Pully. You're really hit bad.

INT. LARGE WARD, COLLINGWOOD HOUSE HOSPITAL, ENGLAND - DAY

Dan wakes in a sweat. The smell of formaldehyde causes him to cough. From somewhere across the room, he hears a man talking as he weeps.

WEEPING PATIENT:

My hands Sister, how am I going to run a press with no hands? And my poor woman, how's she gonna look after me and them three kids too? Better I was dead.

Dan turns his head as two large access doors swing open. A nurse steps into the room carrying a small tray of instruments. She smiles at Dan and stops at the foot of his bed.

NURSE CLEMENT

Well, good morning Sergeant-Major. It's nice to see that you've decided to finally join us.

Dan stares at her but does not respond. She continues speaking as she sets her tray down on the table beside him.

NURSE CLEMENT:

You've been unconscious for nearly a week and just so you know you are back in England.. The doctor says you've been in a coma but he thinks that you'll be just fine once we get you up and about. First I'm going to change those bandages, then we'll see about some breakfast.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

An elderly Major and two young medical officers work their way down the two lines of beds. The Major quietly delivers orders at each bed-stop while the juniors take notes. They halt when they arrive at the foot of Dan's bed.

NETTLES:

Good to see you back in the land of the living Sergeant-Major.

He yanks the sheets back quickly.

DAN:

Woah! That's bloody freezin'.

NETTLES:

Good to know! I'm happy to see you've still got some spunk at least, not nearly enough of that around here. My name is Major Nettles. I am your surgeon and these two tag-a-longs are from the local veterinarian school up the road.

(chuckles)

Now let's have a look at you.

The Major lifts up Dan's right arm and rolls his shoulder to the left then to the right. Dan winces in pain.

DAN:

Son of a bitch, that hurts!

NETTLES:

That's looking much better now. Broken clavicle but it's coming along just fine. Now let's get a look at that leg.

The two junior officers roll Dan on his side and rip the bandages off to expose the stitches on his left calf. The Major presses down on the wound firmly as Dan recoils in pain again.

NETTLES: (CONT'D)

Good, very good. You know at one point we were certain that leg was going to have to come off. I can tell you that if the nurses hadn't kept it from festering you would have been in a much different predicament.

The Major eases the covers back into place then sits down at the foot of the bed.

NETTLES: (CONT'D)

Now that head wound is entirely another story. Obviously you were struck by gunfire on your left side, in the calf and shoulder. It was a miracle that you didn't bleed to death. However, you have a serious concussion that likely occurred when you smashed your head on something hard. I'm certain that you will recover from the other wounds, but that head injury will take more time. So we'll have to keep an eye on you for a while son. Any questions?

DAN:

For how long sir?

NETTLES:

I'd say at least eight to ten weeks.

DAN:

Then can I return to my regiment?

The Major throws his arms up and sighs.

NETTLES:

You're all the bloody same! Can't wait to get back to the damn war. Too much obligation to your mates and not enough common sense.

Trying to change the mood Dan sits up to face the doctor.

DAN:

Hey doc, has someone let my wife know that I'm here.

The Major turns to Nurse Clement looking for a response.

CLEMENT:

Not yet Sergeant-Major, but I'll have a nurse come by in the morning to help you craft a letter to her.

Dan starts to ease back down and then quickly sits back up.

DAN:

Do you know where my pocket watch
might be?

The doctor turns back to Nurse Clement, who shakes her head.

CLEMENT:

Sorry doctor, he arrived a bloody
mess with no personal items.

Dan pushes down into the pillow and lets out a low groan.

DAN:

Rose is not going to forgive this!

He turns to stare up at the ceiling and slowly drifts back
into unconsciousness.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. KITCHENER TRAIN STATION - DAY (SPRING 1915)

Dan and ROSE PULBOOK stand huddled together on the crowded
platform as the troops prepare to depart. ROSE (23), a
natural beauty who does nothing to accentuate her looks. Her
main focus is on making a good life for herself and to raise
a family in spite of the war, and her husband.

Dan is distracted by two painters working on a sign behind
them. He smiles as he turns to Rose.

DAN:

They sure did a quick job of
covering it up. No one would ever
even know they called this place
"Berlin".

Rose ignores Dan's comment and hands him a small package
wrapped in tissue. Dan carefully unwraps it and raises up a
shining brass pocket watch. He opens the cover to reveal a
picture of Rose placed opposite the timepiece.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Oh my. Thanks very much Luv! It's
exactly what I need and a lovely
picture of you to keep me safe!

Rose looks at him sternly and then reluctantly responds.

ROSE:

I want you to take good care of it
and bring it back in the same
condition.

DAN:

I promise I will, Luv. You can
count on me.

ROSE:

Just like your other promise to me?

DAN:

(exasperated)
C'mon Rose, can't we please let
that go just for today?

ROSE:

No, I'll never let it go, Danny.
Not ever! You swore to me that you
would never go back to them again.

The waiting train bellows a burst of steam. Dan turns to see
another couple lost in a heavy embrace.

DAN:

Please Rose, don't let's say good-
bye like this.

He pulls her tight against him and leans down to kiss her on
the lips. She turns her face away and pushes him back.

ROSE:

What if they find you? You'll be
shot that same day.

DAN:

(tries to comfort her)
Don't worry Luv, they'll never find
me. I'm in a whole different army
now with no connection to them.

ROSE:

(pulls away angrily)
Oh, for God's sake Danny, give
yourself a shake! Just look around
you! Same king, same flag, even the
same arrogant English generals!
Sooner or later they *will* discover
you and when they do I promise I
won't shed a tear! You were
perfectly safe here and now you've
just thrown everything away for no
good reason.

DAN:

(trying to hide his
growing anger)

I have to go Rose, why can't you see that? I can't let all these other guys do the fightin' for us while I'm mak'n excuses for not be'in at the front. I've gotta go do my share!

ROSE:

That's all a lot of balderdash and you know it. The truth is that you just can't keep yourself out of it. Plain and simple. So I won't promise you that I'll be here if you ever do come back!

The final whistle shrieks. Dan quickly kisses her cheek and turns to join his company as the troops begin to board the train as steam engulfs the platform.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY IN SMALL HOUSE IN HESPLER, ONTARIO - DAY

Rose was just finishing dressing when she hears a loud knock at the front door. She mutters to herself about her neighbour as she descends the stairs.

ROSE:

All right, I'm coming you nosey old maid. I'll get those stupid weeds cleaned out of your crappy old fence today.

Rose looks through the small pane of glass at the front door to see the back of a tall man with a mop of ginger blond hair standing on her stoop. She pulls the door open just enough to speak to him.

ROSE: (CONT'D)

Yes?

The man turns quickly to face her and greets her with a wide beaming smile.

JAKE:

Hello Rose Darlin'. I've come all the way from California to steal you away to the best meal in town.

Rose breaks into a wide grin and offers her hand.

ROSE:

Oh my goodness. Jake Charlton. I don't believe it. I never thought I'd see the day.

Jake grins and steps up to shake her hand.

JAKE:

Yep, it's me all right Rosie. It's truly a joy to finally meet you.

Rose smiles and reaches out to grab Jake by the elbow.

ROSE:

Come in Jake, come in. I can't believe it's really you!

Jake smiles as he crosses the threshold and hands Rose a small bouquet of gardenias.

JAKE:

Danny told me they're your favorite.

Rose takes the bouquet and smiles as she inhales and pulls the flowers to her chest

ROSE:

Oh how lovely, perfectly lovely.

JAKE:

My pleasure, Rose. I can see that he wasn't lying. You must be still the most beautiful girl in all of Kent.

Rose blushes as Jake looks around past the entry.

JAKE: (CONT'D)

So where is the old stud? I can't wait to see the shock on his face when he sees me standing here.

Rose's smile fades as she turns away and lowers her head.

ROSE:

He's in France. He's been gone for a year.

Jake stares at her in disbelief.

JAKE:

What! You must be jokin'.

Rose shakes her head.

ROSE:

He just couldn't stay out of it.
They sounded a bugle and waved the
flag and he ran right back to them
like a moth to a flame.

JAKE:

Well, where the hell is he? Is he
alright?

Rose pauses and looks directly at Jake.

ROSE:

I have no idea where he is Jake.
The last time he wrote he said his
regiment was moving up somewhere
near the Somme River but I haven't
heard anything more from him in
weeks. I honestly don't even know
if he's still alive.

Jake slaps the doorframe hard with his left hand.

JAKE:

You mean to say that he was stupid
enough to climb back into uniform
to fight for those same lousy
bastards who left us for dead?

ROSE:

I can't tell you the number of
times I tried to tell him that
Jake. I begged him to stay, but he
was determined to go. He could be
shot dead for desertion right now
for all I know.

JAKE:

That stupid son of a bitch! After
all the bullshit we had to go
through to escape and he runs right
back to them.

(pauses)

Hell, all he ever talked about was
getting back to you and as far away
from England as he could.

Rose listens as tears roll down her cheeks.

ROSE:

I know Jake. He swore to me before I left England that he'd never go back to them. Now he claims it's all different because he can fight in the Canadian army. I'm sure they'll find him any day and shoot him for desertion. You must be on their list too.

Jake pauses then drops his head.

JAKE:

Who cares. I'm an American now so they won't dare touch me. You know Rose, I still can't believe we made it outta there alive.

He reaches out to ease her close in comfort.

JAKE: (CONT'D)

What a Goddamn fool. And to think I came all the way from California to bring you both back with me for Christ's sake.

Rose tucks her head into Jake's shoulder and weeps quietly.

EXT. GRAVEL LANEWAY IN HESPLER - EVENING

Rose and Jake run back from a town as the rain begins to pour. When they reach the cover of the front porch Rose dusts the rain off her old hat as Jack shakes out his jacket.

ROSE:

You'd better come in and dry off by the fire.

JAKE:

Much obliged. Too bad there's no such thing as a cab around here. I may have to swim back to the hotel.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A large fire is roaring. Jake is still toweling his hair as Rose tosses him a woolen shirt.

ROSE:

You look a little soggy. This should fix you up.

Jack struggles into the shirt and chuckles when he realizes the arms are too short.

JAKE:
Perfect, for churning butter.

Rose chuckles and takes one step closer to him.

ROSE:
I didn't think he was that much shorter than you.
(pauses and smiles)
Thank-you again for the lovely dinner. It's been a long time since I've enjoyed a meal so much.

JAKE:
Who would believe there would be a shortage of beef here in Canada. And that wine was just terrible.

Rose slips past him into the kitchen and returns with a bottle of brandy and two short glasses.

ROSE:
We have shortages on everything here now. Just going out to eat was a major treat for me.
(pours the two glasses)
It's not much but it should warm us up.

JAKE:
Thank you, that will do perfectly.

They clink a toast and Rose curls up in the chair next to the fire. Jake tucks into a corner of the sofa and stares into the flames.

JAKE: (CONT'D)
Tell me what you miss most about England.

ROSE:
Not that much at all.
(pauses to reflect)
Definitely not working in that awful regal household. Just my mum and the music halls of course.

Jake takes a long sip and continues.

JAKE:

San Francisco has eight music halls. Each of them sold out almost every night.

ROSE:

It must be wonderful living in California.

JAKE:

I love it there and there's money to be made everywhere you look.

ROSE:

I thought they were still recovering from that awful earthquake.

JAKE:

Naw, that was over ten years ago. Most of the city has been rebuilt. New buildings are going up every day. It's a real boom town again.

ROSE:

So why are you here Jake?

JAKE:

I was hopin' that you two would hop on a train and come back with me.

ROSE:

I understand that, but why come all the way to Hespler? You could have just written.

JAKE:

Mr. Curtis, my boss in San Francisco owns a small aircraft factory in Buffalo. He's planning to move it to California and he asked me to find out what it would take to make that happen. So, while I was close by, I thought I should stop in to see you both. I knew Danny would never leave unless you'd agree.

ROSE:

It's too bad you didn't come a little earlier. I would have had us packed and out the door in an hour.

Jake pauses and takes another sip.

JAKE:
He saved my life in India, you
know. I would never have made it
without him.

Rose stands up, picks up the bottle, steps to the sofa and
refills his glass.

ROSE:
You're obviously tied at the hip
because he says it was you who
saved his life.

Jake catches her hand and whispers.

JAKE:
I think he's the luckiest man I
know. You are the loveliest woman
I've ever met and

ROSE:
You are a first class tease, Jake
Charlton.

Rose hesitates and starts to pull away, pauses and then
reaches out to touch his hair

ROSE: (CONT'D)
It's nearly dry now. I think you
should be going.

He looks toward the window then back to her.

JAKE:
Just til it stops.

ROSE:
This is quickly becoming much more
complicated than it should be. He
is my husband and your best friend.

Jake eases Rose forward beside him on the sofa. He kisses her
cheek tenderly as she pushes his hair back from his forehead.
Outside the wind drives the rain hard against the window.

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM THE NEXT DAY - DAWN

Rose wakes with the morning sun shining through the window.
She stretches her arm across the empty bed and pauses
anxiously. She slips into her robe and steps downstairs.

ROSE:

Jake, are you down here?

She halts at the bottom of the stairs when she sees the folded shirt and a tented page of paper beside the vase of gardenias. She moves to sit on the sofa and unfolds the page.

ROSE: (CONT'D)

(reading)

"I thought it would be easiest this way. I will remember last night always. I will write from Buffalo. Love, Jake."

Rose tries to hold back her tears as she lifts the shirt to her face and gazes across the embers of last night's fire. Suddenly there is a sharp knock at the door. Smiling with anticipation she tosses the page into the fireplace and hurries to the front door.

ROSE: (CONT'D)

Jake! Oh, Jake.

She swings the door open and freezes when she sees the old woman. Mrs. Martin steps forward and immediately wags a finger to scold her.

MRS. MARTIN:

Mrs. Pulbrook, I insist that you clean up those weeds on your side of my fence before they invade my entire property.

Rose drops her head and begins to sob.

EXT. ENTRY GATE OF COLLINGWOOD MILIARY HOSPITAL ENGLAND - DAY

Two sergeants jump from the rear of a slow moving mail truck and stroll up to the main gate past a sign reading "Collingwood House: Restricted Access". They are stopped by the duty sergeant.

DUTY SERGEANT (DS):

I guess they don't require you to read in the Canadian Army but that sign says you can't come in.

MITCH:

Easy now Colonel. We've only got two days leave left and we've come all the way up here to see our pal before we head back to France.

DS:

I don't care if you came all the way from China. You won't get into this facility without a class one entry permit. Is that clear?

MITCH:

OK granddad. Where do we go to get one of those?

DO:

Your CO will have to get authority from your division headquarters in London.

JOEY:

But that will take weeks.

DS:

Months more likely. So why don't you give me your names and we'll pass on a message to your friend.

MITCH:

Why all the hullabaloo for Christ sakes? We just want to visit our pal, cheer him up a bit.

DS:

Look Sergeant, there are more than four hundred wounded and dying men all jammed in there and there's less than forty doctors and nurses working day and night stichin' and sawin' trying to save lives.

(he lowers his voice)

It's not a pretty sight and the last thing anyone needs is for you clods to come bumbling in trying to find one man. So be good fellas now and run along.

The two men mutter under their breath as they backtrack out to the road. Mitch is upset and mutters as he walks.

MITCH:

I ain't leavin' til I see him.

A supply truck honks at them to move out of the way as it slowly rounds the curve and turns into a road marked 'Service Entrance'. The men exchange a quick glance and race to jump on the tailgate and slip in behind some crates.

EXT. GARDEN, COLLINGWOOD HOUSE HOSPITAL, ENGLAND - DAY

Dan is parked in a wheelchair under an oak tree with a cluster of other patients. He is quietly re-reading a letter to Corporal Frank Edger, whose entire head and neck are heavily bandaged. There are small slits cut for his nose and mouth but none for his eyes.

DAN:

(reading)

"I pray you will come home to me soon, my Darling. We can finally have that honeymoon in Montreal. Dad says you are not to worry about your job at the bank, it will be there waiting for you when you come home. I kiss your picture every night and I miss you more and more every day. Your loving wife, Eve."

The man weeps softly, his tears are evident through the wet layers of his cotton bandages.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Why don't you let me write to her for you Frank? This letter is six weeks old. She has to know you're alive and that you'll be back in Toronto soon.

Frank coughs then whispers quietly.

FRANK:

Thanks Dan, but that's impossible for me. I can never let her see me like this. I'm never going home again. I'll tell them to just dump me off in Halifax and leave me there. I'll never go home again, never.

A sudden uproar across the lawn grabs their attention. Two NCO'S in battle dress burst through the hedges at the far end of the garden. They bump and pardon their way past a few patients and are finally corralled by a cluster of beds and wheelchairs. They break the silence by calling out loudly.

MITCH:

Dan Pulbrook? Has anyone seen Sergeant-Major Pulbrook?

JOEY:

Hey Pully, we've come all the way from France just to see ya.

Dan leans forward and turns toward the two men. When he recognizes the two invaders he roars with laughter.

DAN:
Wilcox, Murphy, don't move, you're surrounded on all sides! Just stay where you are, keep your heads down and we'll send out a patrol to bring you in safely.

The other patients begin to chuckle and chime in on the fun.

PATIENT #1:
Prepare to load bedpans.

PATIENT #2:
Surrender or we'll fire a full volley at you.

The two sergeants throw their hands up smiling.

JOEY:
OK, OK. We know when we're licked.

MITCH:
Hold your fire, we'll go quietly.

Dan turns to his blind companion.

DAN:
The battle-hardened men of the Collingwood Light Gurney Regiment have just captured two heavily armed infiltrators from the Royal Distillery Commandos who are obviously hell bent on occupying this facility.

He waves his arms and calls out to his two friends.

DAN: (CONT'D)
Over here you dopes! Hands over your heads and move slowly or I'll turn those murderous bedpan snipers loose to finish you off.

Mitch and Joey squeeze their way around the lines of wheelchairs and crutches, apologizing as they go.

DAN: (CONT'D)
I guess the front door was just too easy for you.

MITCH:

They wouldn't let us in, so we had to improvise and come in this way.

DAN:

You're lucky you weren't arrested for impersonating real soldiers.

They all laugh aloud, shake hands and embrace.

DAN: (CONT'D)

It's great to see you guys,

Dan turns to look at Joey.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Murphy, who told you you could wear them stripes?

JOEY:

(grins)

Just promoted Sarge. Now we're both 'ass-kickers' just like you.

DAN:

Forget that Joey, you ain't ready to lead a bunch over the top.

MITCH:

There's barely a dozen of us left from the old gang now Pully. Besides he's already led two charges into the teeth of it.

DAN:

You've got to be kidding me! What's next, Jasper for Prime Minister?

JOEY:

(lowers his head)

Jasper's dead. A sniper got him three weeks ago near Amiens.

Dan groans and lowers his head.

DAN:

He was the best damn soldier in the regiment.

Joey nods and pauses before he continues.

JOEY:

That was a hell of a thing you did
back there at Amiens Pully, just a
hell of a thing.

An woman's angry voice shatters the moment.

NURSE LIEUTENANT WALLS:

Just what the bloody hell do you
two idiots think you're playing at?
You've invaded a restricted area
and you are about to be arrested.

Walls storms up the knoll, her two subordinates trail behind.

JOEY

Now take it easy Sister, ah
Lieutenant Ma'am. We came all the
way from France to see our pal,
Dan. We just want a few minutes to
see that he's ok and then we'll be
on our way.

WALLS:

You'll be on your way this instant
or you'll be explaining it to your
commanding officer from the brig.

DAN:

Relax Lieutenant. I'll move them
along now.

Walls nods to the closest sister behind her.

WALLS:

Sister Forsythe please escort these
two clowns to the front gate.

DAN:

I'd like to go that far with them,
if that's alright Sister.

WALLS:

Fine, just make it snappy! Sister
Forsythe, take charge here
immediately, and then return the
Sergeant-Major to his bed.

Frank intervenes with a chuckle.

FRANK:

Take him back to his bed. Well,
I've definitely heard worse orders.

The men all laugh as they move off toward the main gate.

MITCH:

Hurry back Pully! We're taking a real shit-kicking without ya.

DAN:

I'll see you as quick as I can but first I need to pick-up my cleaning.

After a series of shoulder pats, handshakes and grim nods the two soldiers finally pass through the main gate. As it closes behind him Joey turns back for a final good-bye.

JOEY:

See you down the road Dan.

MITCH:

See you in hell Pully!

DAN:

Only if they still have room.

Dan watches the men round the corner. Sister Forsythe pushes the wheelchair back down the hallway. Dan is silent and glum.

Forsythe breaks the silence.

FORSYTHE:

Doctor Nettles says if you continue to recover this well you could soon be granted a 'restricted leave'.

Dan turns around to look back at her.

DAN:

What the heck does that mean?

FORSYTHE:

It means that on occasion you can leave the hospital for a few hours at a time. You still need a lot of rest so afternoons only, definitely no alcohol and no pubs.

DAN:

Will I be able to catch up with my pals today?

FORSYTHE:

Certainly not today. You'll need more testing for that concussion, perhaps in a week or two.

DAN:

Then what? Light naps and tea parties?

FORSYTHE:

Something like that. I'll have to accompany you, but at least you can get out for a few hours.

DAN:

Well sister, if it can get me away from this place, I'll be delighted to buy you a pint.

FORSYTHE:

Just a cup of tea will do nicely, Sergeant-Major, nothing more.

Dan chuckles aloud again.

DAN:

Done! You've got a deal Miss, ah, Forsythe?

FORSYTHE:

It's missus, Sergeant-Major. And let's be clear, this is part of your recovery plan, nothing more.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY AT COLLINGWOOD HOUSE HOSPITAL - DAY

Dan is seated in a line waiting for the doctor to arrive. He is dressed in a new uniform with a cane parked beside him. As Major Nettles enters his office, he stops in front of Dan. He turns back to address the small entourage that trails behind him.

NETTLES:

Mrs. Evans, please remain here. The rest of you get back to your duties and get this place ready for the next bunch. They should be arriving here early tomorrow morning.

Nettles turns to speak to Dan.

NETTLES: (CONT'D)

Pulbrook, what on earth are you doing here? I told you that you need more rest, so don't expect leave us for another few weeks.

DAN:

But I'm fit and ready to go now,
sir.

NETTLES:

Nonsense, you can't even walk
without that cane. Now turn around
and get right back to bed.

DAN:

Sir, I can walk well enough to
return to my regiment and handle a
couple of days of light duty.
Besides Major, it sounds like
you're gonna need that bed.

Nettles pauses as he scans the line of five seated men.

NETTLES:

How many of the rest of you feel
ready to leave us?

Four of the men shoot their hands up while the last man
quietly shakes his head.

The Major nods and then turns to Nurse lieutenant Evans.

NETTLES: (CONT'D)

Mrs. Evans, I'll leave you in
charge of these men. If you can
stretch the rules, then get them
out of here as quick as you can.
Pulbrook is right, we do need those
beds.

Nettles turns back to the faces waiting in line.

NETTLES: (CONT'D)

If any of you feel able to help
move a few patients out to the
local churches, we would appreciate
it very much.

Dan scans the group of seated men then looks up.

DAN:

Of course, Major. We'll be happy to
give you a hand.

EXT. ENTRY GATE OF THE RENNER TEXTILES FACTORY IN KITCHENER
ONTARIO - DUSK

It is snowing lightly as a group of women chat in line as a whistle blows to signal the shift change. A rusty chain fence separates two lines of workers. A tired gang of middle-aged men are leaving as the women step forward to start the night shift. Rose is with her two friends, Lily and Sal.

As the men push past, a few try to engage them in conversation. Myles Sullivan, is the self appointed leader of the group. He retains his authority by making life miserable for the women of the night shift. He leans into the dividing fence and targets Rose again.

SULLIVAN:

Hey there m'lovely, why don't you pack it in for the night? We'll grab a couple of pints and I'll show how a real man can put a big smile on your pretty face.

His four pals snicker behind him. His cohort Archie Grimes joins in the fun by trying to torment Sally.

GRIMES:

Yeah we'll cover a shift for ya and you can make it up with a lick and a rub.

ROSE:

You know something Sal. They're doing an amazing job here. The day shift is so short of men, they fill it with a bunch of pigs who think they can talk.

SULLIVAN:

I'll cover your shift for ya but you'll be stretched out under me.

The four men all snicker louder.

SALLY:

Now there's a nightmare no woman should endure.

LILY:

Not even his wife.

The group of women around them laugh aloud as the two lines start to amble away from one another. The men glare back toward them and mutter.

INT. FACTORY - NIGHT

The factory is cold, damp and poorly lit. In the assembly room a series of wide leather belts located eight feet above the sewing tables drive the production line.

The whistle blasts again and the production line chugs to a start as the room is overwhelmed by an eruption so loud that everyone must shout to be heard.

Two women roll a dolly of a half dozen bales toward the workstations as four others climb up ladders to reach the top of the stacked bales to lower them down to the floor.

Sally is standing with one foot on a rung and the other braced against a bale. Marg Stevens is close beside her straddling one of the bales and holding an end of a lead line. Sally stretches out to catch the opposite end of the rope. She shakes her head as she rants against the day crew.

SALLY:

Those filthy bastards know better than to stack them more than three high. Oh, what the Hell!
(pauses then shouts)
You all set Margie?

MARG:

All set Sal. Give it a good tug and let's get things goin'.

The two women heave on opposite ends of the line and a single bale strains upward and begins to slide forward.

MARG: (CONT'D)

Again.

SALLY:

One more good snap of the wrist will do it.

Sally snaps her line hard and the rope ripples across two bales then catches on a corner of the bale.

MARG:

Hold on one second, Sal. It's snagged.

Sally cannot hear her above the rattling din of the moving belts. She yanks hard again on the rope.

SALLY:

(muttering)
What the hell is going on now?

MARG:
 (yelling loudly)
 NO! STOP SALLY. STOP!

The warning goes unheard. Now determined, Sally wraps the line around her waist and tugs it taught. Marg's end digs in against an old wooden pulley that begins to tear away from its mooring and snaps the rope in two. Immediately the first bale careens forward to ram another into a roll.

Marg begins to scream in terror as the pyramid of bales starts to collapse.

MARG: (CONT'D)
 SALLY. GET OUT OF THERE NOW. RUN!

Sally gasps as the bale under her feet rolls away. Seated at a table Rose jumps up and yanks Lily behind her to safety as the entire wall of heavy bales cave in. No one hears Sally's screams as nine huge bales send her crashing down to the wooden floor. Thirty seconds later a siren wails its emergency warning.

INT. CLANCY'S PUB AS FEW DOORS FROM THE FACTORY - NIGHT

While the siren blares Sullivan ambles over to a window, beer in hand. As others race out the door toward the factory, Sullivan turns back to rejoin his pals who haven't budged from the table.

SULLIVAN:
 They've done it again, Archie.
 Another bloody screw up.

Archie nods and continues to swallow his beer.

SULLIVAN: (CONT'D)
 You watch, there'll be hell to pay tomorrow. That bastard Templeton will demand that we make up for their losses from tonight.

GRIMES:
 God damned women. Why don't they just stay home where they belong?

ENGLAND: INT JASPER'S RAILWAY CAFE EARLY - DAY

Dan hurries through the door and spots her seated at a tiny corner table by the window just as she shakes her head at a young British officer. As the man tactfully retreats, Dan smiles and sits down beside her.

DAN:

Looks like I'll have to get you a stick to keep them all away. Sorry I'm a little late. I was doin' God's work shepherding the lambs to safety.

Forsythe returns the smile and pours him a cup of hot tea.

FORSYTHE:

So I've heard. Most admirable Sergeant-Major. We can always use another good orderly.

DAN:

I'm sure you've been told often that your eyes light up when you smile.

FORSYTHE:

(blushing)
Mmmm, I'll try to remember that.

DAN:

This is a tough place for a personal conversation. Surely there must be somewhere else that can afford us more privacy?

Forsythe shakes her head and smiles.

FORSYTHE:

Let me just consider that very romantic invitation Sergeant-Major.

Dan leans forward to take her hand.

DAN:

I'm sorry but I am aching to spend some time with you and we haven't much time left before I return to the regiment.

Forsythe leans forward and speak softly.

FORSYTHE:

This is all moving a little quickly, but I confess I'd like that too.

(pauses)

I suppose if we are going to carry on with this little conspiracy you should call me Grace.

DAN:

I'm delighted Grace. I'll leave it for you to discover that special opportunity for us to get to know each other better.

Recognizing that people have begun to take notice of them Dan eases back in his chair to change the topic.

DAN: (CONT'D)

The hospital is overflowing at every corner. They're tossing every guy they can into the church halls.

GRACE:

It's a terrible choice to make but they're sending us at least another fifty wounded every week now.

DAN:

Can't they send them somewhere else? I mean there must be other hospitals available.

GRACE:

Every hospital in England is overcrowded. It will only get worse before it gets better.

They sit quietly sipping tea, gathering their thoughts.

DAN:

Well, if you're right, I guess it'll finally end when we're all dead on both sides.

GRACE:

Well that's a dismal attitude I must say.

DAN:

Sorry, I guess I'm just a little upset by a letter I got from home.

GRACE:

Oh, what's happened?

DAN:

Rose wrote about a pal of mine who's been sent to some kinda special hospital for long term recovery. Do you have any idea where that could be?

GRACE:

There are a couple of places.
Depends on the severity of his
wounds?

DAN:

Rose said he's been badly wounded
but that's all they would tell her.

GRACE:

If he's that seriously wounded they
likely sent him to GC.

DAN:

GC. What's that?

GRACE:

Grey Castle Hospital. It's a long
term recovery unit in the far west
country, near the border of Wales.

DAN:

Well, I gotta go see him, so how do
I get there?

GRACE:

Forget it Dan, they won't let you
in.

DAN:

Why not? We were best pals back
home.

GRACE:

If you thought our hospital has
strict rules, I can tell you GC is
much more stringent.

She looks down sadly into her cup.

GRACE: (CONT'D)

Honestly, it's a warehouse for
those poor soldiers whose wounds
are so horrendous they can never go
home. And it's hidden far away so
no one in England will ever know
about it. Most of us call it the
Leper Colony.

He hangs his head and mutters a reply.

DAN:

Well, I'm going anyway. I gotta find him and let him know I'll be back for him when it's all over.

She exhales slowly and glances out the window.

GRACE:

A group of us transferred some patients there last year. You take the train to Cardiff and get off near the Welsh border. It's about two miles further north. But it doesn't matter because you won't get in without a pass.

DAN:

Oh, I'll get in alright, don't you worry about that.

GRACE:

Then what? Will I see you again before you go back to the front?

He brightens and leans forward to take her hand and looks into her eyes.

DAN:

I promise I'll see you right back here at noon on Thursday my lovely Grace. I just hope you can keep all those hungry wolves away til then.

EXT. MAIN GATE AT GREY CASTLE HOSPITAL - DAY

It's raining as Dan steps up to the main gate and rings the bell. An old sergeant opens the window of a huge wooden door and speaks to him through the steel bars.

GATE SERGEANT:

No visitors without a pass.

Dan waves a blank piece of blue paper for him to see.

DAN:

I do have a pass, grandad. Come and check it for yourself.

The old man pushes his face closer to the bars.

SEAGEANT:

It better have an officer's signature or you won't get in.

DAN:
Of course it has. It's signed by a
colonel to be exact.

The old man's demeanor changes as he opens the gate and Dan brushes past him inside.

GATE SARGANT:
Oh, well a colonel is good. Very
good indeed.

Dan stands under the portico and brushes the water from his tunic.

DAN:
God, I'm bloody soaking. Is there
somewhere I can dry off?

SEAGEANT:
Down the stairs to the right.
There's a fire in the gallery.

Dan runs to the staircase and calls back.

DAN:
Thanks awfully mate.

SEAGEANT:
What about that pass Sargnmajr? I'm
supposed to check it.

DAN:
It's a little damp but it'll dry
out. Thanks very much sergeant.

INT. GC HOSPITAL - DAY

Dan stands in front of a bright fire. An orderly with slicked back hair enters. He is wearing a white medical jacket and a pair of officer's new dress boots. He approaches Dan.

CORPORAL HURLBUT:
Well, you are new.

DAN:
I'm here to see an old friend.

HURLBUT:
(pushes his hair back)
That's very nice Sergeant-Major.
But nicer still if you'd consider
meeting some new friends as well.

Dan is instantly offended and unloads his wrath at the man.

DAN:
Just who the hell do you think you
are? You creepy little popinjay!

A woman's voice calls out from down the hall. A pudgy little nurse enters the room accompanied by another orderly wearing a fez. She wipes her hands on her apron as she calls to Dan.

NURSE LISTER:
Can we help you Sergeant-Major?

DAN:
Thank-you Ma'am. I'm here to visit
an old pal of mine from Canada,
Sergeant Stan Clinton.

HURLBUT:
Oh, Stan the man.

LISITER:
That will do Corporal.
(turns to face Dan)
We tolerate him because he's good
at his job and the patients enjoy
his antics. Although sometimes he
can cross the line.
(attempts a brief smile.)
My name is Sister Eloise Lister. I
am in charge of the eighth ward.
Sergeant Clinton is under my care.

DAN:
(hiding a smile)
Thank-you very much, ah, Sister
Lister.

ELOISE:
I know, it is rather amusing isn't
it?

DAN:
I think it's rather charming.

ELOISE:
(blushes and then turns to
Hurlbut)
You stay with me Corporal.
(turns back to Dan)
Faraj here can take you to the
sunroom where Stan likes to meet
his friends.

DAN:
A sunroom in this dank hole?

HURLBUT:
It's the patients' little joke.

Lance corporal Faraj steps forward to greet him. He speaks in a mid-east accent.

FARAJ:
If you will follow me sir please?

DAN:
After you. Faraj, is it?

FARAJ:
Lance Corporal Faraj Abdulla. I am the second orderly in ward eight.

DAN:
And just where do you hail from Corporal?

FARAJ:
I am from Cairo, Egypt.

DAN:
Good God, they're pullin' us in from all over the empire now. How is ol' Stan? We heard he got hit at the Somme, somewhere near Beau Hamel.

FARAJ:
The sergeant is not too well. He gets more not well always.

The two men step through a heavy door at the end of the hallway into a dark room barely lit by a large fire. A group of a dozen patients in wheelchairs are quietly chatting in one corner. Hurlbut enters behind them carrying a tray of bottles and glasses.

HURLBUT:
Well Faraj, you certainly have captured today's prize.

Dan glares at Hurlbut and then calls across the room.

DAN:
STAN, STAN CLINTON.

Faraj points to the far corner of the room.

FARAJ:

Over there. He is the one in a blue hat.

Dan walks quickly toward a man wearing a blue beret who is facing the fire. His wounds are truly gruesome. The entire left side of his face has been terribly burned, his nose has been partially torn away leaving two tiny holes that barely allow him to breathe. For a moment Dan feels sure he might vomit but regains his composure and whispers to Stan.

DAN:

Hey Stan, it's me, Danny. I've come all the way from Canada to see ya.

Stan blinks slowly in a drug induced state. His face brightens as a note of recognition comes across him.

STAN:

(in barely a whisper)
D-D-Danny.

DAN:

I had to come find ya Stan. I couldn't pretend you were lost with nobody to look out for ya.

Stan nods as his eyes fill with tears. Dan apologizes as he squeezes around three wheelchairs of equally tortured men to face Stan. He has a full view of Stan's circumstance. His blanket has fallen beside his wheelchair revealing that both legs were amputated above the knee. Dan forces himself not to look away.

HURLBUT:

(reverently)
He's amongst the best patients we have here. The others rely on him to keep them going.

Without looking up Dan answers as calmly as he can.

DAN:

We were best of friends in Canada. I couldn't bear not knowing what happened to him.

HURLBUT:

You must be that Danny then. You're married to Rose and you share a little house in some village not far from Toronto.

Dan nods at Hurlbut and then turns back to Stan.

HURLBUT: (CONT'D)

Oh, he's often told us about you three, too often for me, but the others seem to revel in his stories of Canada. We know all about Rose's wonderful cooking, the beautiful flowers in her garden and how he cheated so well at cards at the pub that he could pay for his share of the expenses without working a day.

Dan smiles and swallows hard as tears fill his eyes. He reaches down to gently squeeze Stan's good hand.

HURLBUT: (CONT'D)

Of course that was all before his stroke. Now he can hardly speak at all. Still, the men here all love him like a brother.

DAN:

What's his prognosis?

HURLBUT:

The doctors give him a just a few weeks, probably six at the most. He's just not strong enough to continue on much longer.

DAN:

(swallowing hard)

Is there anything I can do for him. Anything he needs?

HURLBUT:

We do everything to try to keep them content. We give them all the medications they need or want.

DAN:

Like what?

HURLBUT:

Well, some are prescribed by the doctors. Others are provided by us.

DAN:

You mean like opium?

HURLBUT:

Opium, cocaine, heroine, whatever they need to get them through.

(pauses)

(MORE)

HURLBUT: (CONT'D)

You're his friend so I'll tell you straight. Stan has developed a strong appetite for cocaine. Probably more than what's good for him, but no one really cares.

DAN:

Good for him! If he's gonna die in a couple of weeks, who gives a damn whether it's good for him or not. Just keep giving it to him as long as it makes him happy.

HURLBUT:

We do. But the problem is his appetite is exceeding his regular pay. He's fallen behind by a few pounds.

Dan realizes he's being played and reaches into his trouser pocket to pull out some money.

DAN:

Well all I have is about two pounds.

He tosses some coins on the floor.

HURLBUT:

I'm sure that will do nicely. Thank you, Sergeant-Major.

Dan turns away and leans in to touch his forehead against Stan's, who nods in response as tears roll down his blistered cheek.

DAN:

We all love you Stan. Rose sends you all her love and wants you to hurry home as soon as you can. She'll make your favorite liver and bacon dinner for you.

A faint smile crosses Stan's lips and then his eyes roll back and his head sinks down toward his chest. Dan pauses to stare directly at Hurlbut.

DAN: (CONT'D)

I'm countin' on you to take good care of him. If I find out otherwise, I'll come back here and deal with you personally.

Hurlbut nods and steps back. Dan turns to look at all the horrific broken faces of the men around him. He steps past Faraj and walks quietly back out to the front door.

EXT. NEWS AGENT BOOTH NEAR THE TRAIN STATION - DUSK

Dan hurries from the train station and stops to pick up a paper from a tiny news stand. He scans the headlines. "*Stalemate at the Somme Continues*"... "*U-boats sink more ships off Ireland*". He tosses a penny into a box, folds the paper and notices another headline below the fold. "*Winning the air war, Yanks volunteer for France*". He dashes across the street toward the café and spots Grace standing beside the entry door.

DAN:

Thanks for waiting Grace.

Grace smiles and steps forward out of the door to take him by the arm.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Where are we off to?

GRACE:

I'd love you to meet my aunt Phyliss, she lives just at the top of the next road. She's always talking about visiting her cousin in Canada and I told her that we'd drop by for a visit.

DAN:

Just my luck, another 'guided tour of the wonders of faraway Canada'.

GRACE:

Oh come on, a little socializing with a dear old lady won't kill you!

EXT. SMALL COTTAGE - DUSK

Grace and Dan walk up to a small thatched-roof bungalow. Grace stoops down to pick up a key under a small welcome mat, unlocks the door and turns on a gas lamp to the right of the doorway. The light quickly reveals a folded note on the hall table.

Grace opens it quickly reads it aloud to Dan.

GRACE: (CONT'D)

"Gracie, apologies for the short notice. I had to leave for a few days to tend to mother. She's come down with another cold although I suspect she just wants company. God willing I hope to be back by Tuesday. There's a bottle of Inverness in the sideboard to share with your friend".

Dan chuckles as he looks around.

DAN:

This is definitely my idea of socializing with your dear aunt!

INT. SAME COTTAGE - EVENING

Dan uncorks the bottle of scotch and pours two large glasses as Grace lights a fire in living room.

DAN:

You were so right about that place. It's full of the worst kind of horrors.

GRACE:

How badly is he hurt?

DAN:

I could barely look at him, he's so severely burned. Half of his face was blown away and he's lost both legs. And he's a cocaine addict. The staff keep him well supplied, for a profit of course.

GRACE:

That's becoming all too common I'm afraid.

Tell me about him in Canada. Why were you so close?

Dan takes a long sip and stares into the fire.

DAN:

We met in line at the railway station in Montreal. He was on his way to a new job at a factory in a Ontario.

(MORE)

DAN: (CONT'D)

Rose helped him out by explaining his destination to the Frenchie at the desk. Stan was so grateful, he insisted that we should come along and join him.

I had no job to go to, so we agreed to give it a shot. We all made our way to Hespler, a village just outside of Berlin. The following week Stan and I started working together at the textile factory.

GRACE:

Berlin? In Canada?

DAN:

Yep, that's what they called it back then. There were lots of good Germans folks who'd settled in the area first. When the war started, the city elders quickly renamed the town "Kitchener" to show that we were just as British as any other place in Canada.

GRACE:

How long were you there together?

DAN:

Nearly two years, up until war was declared. Rose took good care of us while Stan and I worked extra shifts at the factory so we could buy a little house together. When the war started Stan left right away for England to join up.

GRACE:

Why didn't you go with him?

Dan inhales slowly then continues

DAN:

It's a long story but I promised Rose that I'd stay out of it.

GRACE:

What changed your mind?

DAN:

Let's just say, I felt good about joining up when I found out that I could fight in the Canadian army.

GRACE:
But surely it's the same. You're
all fighting for the king.

DAN:
Not for me it's not.

Dan pauses and reaches out to touch her arm gently.

DAN: (CONT'D)
Enough about me. I want to you to
tell me about your husband, David
was it?

GRACE:
(puts her glass down)
There's not much to tell. He died
at the front and my life came to a
crashing halt.

DAN:
Where was it, the Somme?

GRACE:
Yes. He'd only been there for a few
weeks.

DAN:
That bloody battle chewed up half
of our bloody army. How did he die?

Grace turns away as tears begin to roll down her cheeks.

GRACE:
He was just a common soldier who
died in France. That's it. Plain
and simple. Please don't ask me
anymore. It's still too difficult
for me to talk about.

Dan is moved by her obvious pain. He moves closer to her.

DAN:
They told me in the hospital that
talking about painful things can
help.

GRACE:
It's easy for you. You're a hero,
decorated, promoted and celebrated.
David was not.

DAN:

You mean he didn't win a medal?
Nobody gives a rat's ass about
stinkin' medals. All we ever care
about is stayin' alive for another
day.

Grace is silent for a few moments then she begins to weep
openly.

GRACE:

They shot him Danny. They tied him
to a post and shot him for
desertion.

Dan is stunned. He takes Grace's hand and remains silent as
she continues.

GRACE: (CONT'D)

It was all my fault. I'd written to
him saying that I was terribly
lonely and I needed him to come
back to me. He was very scared and
homesick. He was just trying to get
back home to be with me.

(pauses to take a breathe)

A French patrol found him with two
others wandering down a railway
line disguised as local farmers.
Silly idea really since none of
them could speak a word of French.
Two weeks later they were court-
martialed and shot.

She looks up into his eyes.

GRACE: (CONT'D)

I should have been stronger for
him. David died a coward because of
me. He was running home to me.

DAN:

If we were honest, we've all wanted
to just run back home.

(tenderly)

I can tell you there's a very fine
line between heroes and cowards.

He takes a long sip and hesitates before continuing.

DAN: (CONT'D)

And I can testify to that
personally.

GRACE:

Not you, not with all you've done.

DAN:

Grace, I was just seventeen when I joined the army here in England, in Kent. I was an orphan and had no other prospects so I thought I might try to make a career of it. After I'd finished basic training Rose and I got engaged. And just three months later they posted my regiment to the Khyber Pass in India to guard the frontier. When we left they said it would only be for eighteen months but that was an intentional lie.

He stares deeper into the fire.

In no time, we were fully engaged with those crazy Afghan Muslims. Then the malaria and dysentery struck the whole damn regiment. We lost nearly half our company in less than eight weeks.

Grace has stopped crying, now intrigued by his story.

GRACE:

That sounds horrible. How did you survive it?

DAN:

They told us to stay there until we were relieved but no such orders ever came. Our guys just kept dyin' with no hope in sight.

(takes a deep breathe)

So my pal Jake and I decided to get the hell out while we could. We snuck away to New Delhi and stowed away on a freighter that we thought was sailing to the States. The crew caught us and threw us down into the engine room where we spent the whole trip shovelin' coal. We finally landed in Brazil and two months later we hopped another ship to the States. Jake jumped off in Baltimore and I headed up to Montreal to meet Rose.

(looks down at his glass)

(MORE)

DAN: (CONT'D)

So, as far as the British army is concerned. I'm still a wanted man, a deserter. Just like David.

He wraps his arms around Grace and looks into her eyes.

They could have me shot at dawn too, Grace. They still might, if they ever find me out!

INT. SAME SMALL COTTAGE. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - NIGHT

The lamp on the dresser reveals the soft curves of her body through her ivory nightgown. Grace moves slowly toward Dan who is seated at the end of the bed, watching her every move. She wraps her arms tenderly around his neck, cups his face in her hands and slowly eases her lips to his. She tosses her nightgown on the chair. He whispers against her ear.

DAN:

I love you Grace.

GRACE:

Then love me now, Darling. I so want you to love me.

INT. COTTAGE BEDROOM - DAWN

Grace reaches across the bed for Dan. She sits up and finds him seated on the edge of the bed with his back to her. She eases up beside him and kisses between his shoulder blades.

GRACE:

It's all right Danny. I love you and I won't ever regret this. I promise.

DAN:

No, it's not that Grace. I love you too, and I'm not sorry at all.

GRACE:

What is it then Darling?

Dan slowly turns to meet her eyes. He kisses her cheek softly and pulls back.

DAN:

When I woke beside you this morning, I realized that I can never go home again.

EXT. CANADIAN ARMY HEADQUARTERS, NEAR AMIENS FRANCE (MARCH 1917) - DAY

Dan steps down from a transport wagon and ducks into the command tent. He stops when he hears a familiar voice. Major Pierce turns back quickly to investigate the interloper and breaks into a wide grin. He steps across the wooden floor to greet Dan.

MAJOR PIERCE:

(shaking hands)

Well, you're sure a sight for sore eyes.

DAN:

Thank-you sir, I won't say it's good to be back, but I have missed the boys.

Pierce shakes his head and points to a chair.

PIERCE:

It's never good to be back in this hell. Wait there for a couple of minutes while I finish up here.

A group of officers scurry past him. A middle aged lieutenant carrying a large portfolio stumbles and spills its contents. Dan steps up to help retrieve some aerial photographs..

LIEUTENANT:

Thank-you Sergeant-Major.

DAN:

No problem sir.

A battered old staff car pulls up outside the tent and two captains race to open the doors. A tall, portly general and a short balding brigadier step out. The general pauses at the entrance to greet a chaplain who has slipped in behind them.

GENERAL:

Stay close by captain, we're going to need your influence with the Almighty in these next few days.

CAPTAIN LEESE:

I will indeed sir.

Major Pierce crosses back to greet Dan.

PIERCE:

C'mon Pully, let's find a cup of tea and I'll get you caught up.

EXT: REAR OF THE COMMAND TENT - DAY

Dan and Pierce are sitting on wooden crates sipping the last dregs from a large tea canister.

DAN:

At least it's hot.

PIERCE:

It's better than the coffee. Even the Kraut prisoners won't touch that stuff. It's great to have you back. How's the head?

DAN:

Good. Just an occasional headache but I'm good to go, sir.

PIERCE:

That was an amazing stunt you pulled. You must've saved more than fifty men. They've nominated you for a medal. Military Cross, I think.

DAN:

I don't want any medals sir. I just want to get back to Mitch and the boys.

(winks at Pierce)

I was hoping they'd have called a truce by now sir so we could all head back to London and march in the big parade.

MAJOR PIERCE:

Truce? There won't be any goddam' truce until those filthy bastards finally quit.

DAN:

In London, all the talk is about the Yanks joining with us.

PIERCE:

All talk. That President Wilson is far too crafty to let that happen.

(stands up quickly)

Listen Sergeant-Major, we've got something special heading our way soon and we've finally got all of our troops pulled together under our own commanding officer.

DAN:

And who the hell might that be sir?

PIERCE:

Major General Arthur Currie, the general you just saw arriving. He's an experienced pro from Byng's command. They say he's the best tactician in the whole damned British army.

DAN:

Judgin' by the results so far that ain't sayin' much.

PIERCE:

Listen Pully, this time it's different. Currie requested independent control of all Canadian forces and Byng gave it to him.

Dan offers a cigarette to Pierce who rejects. Dan lights one for himself taking in the new information.

PIERCE: (CONT'D)

Currie's got all four infantry regiments joined up together here. Black Watch, Princess Pat's, Lord Strath's and us. For the first time in this war we've got the whole damned Canadian Army gathered in one spot, ready to take on the same objective.

DAN:

That's all great sir but just don't tell me that we're gonna waste them on some bullshit attack on another heavily entrenched position that some brainless British general is convinced will win the war.

Pierce winces and turns away.

DAN: (CONT'D)

A cub scout would know there's something big brewing here. I saw dozens of artillery and engineer officers on my way here. I damn near wore my arm out tryin' to salute them.

PIERCE:

By the end of the week we'll have over a hundred thousand men assembled here.

DAN:

(whistles)

Jesus Murphy! I didn't know there were that many men in all of Canada. What about those two Royal Navy princes I saw you with? I figured we must be pullin' 'em off their ships to make some kind of last stand.

PIERCE:

We need their big guns. I'll tell you more about it later. I have more news for you. I am promoting you Warrant Officer First Class, a field officer grade.

Dan instantly explodes in anger.

DAN:

Oh, no sir! I hate all officers. Present company excluded. I refuse to kiss ass for a bunch of limey halfwits and then lie to our men about how easy it's all gonna be. I'm glad they promoted you Major sir, but I don't want the job.

PIERCE:

(angrily)

Too fuckin' bad Pulbrook, you've got it anyway! In the last eight months our regiment has lost more than half our officers and NCO's.

(pauses)

And this time we're really up against it. We need our best guys to lead these men and like it or not, you're it. You're the best I've got Pulbrook. End of story!

DAN:

C'mon Major, I'm no officer. Let me go talk to the colonel about this.

PIERCE:

I *am* the colonel, Mr. Pulbrook. I was promoted just this morning, so now we've both got a lot more on our plates than we ever hoped for.

DAN:

Well lucky us sir! Maybe tomorrow you can be the general and I can be the Major.

PIERCE:

(clearly frustrated)

Knock it off Pulbrook. I forgot what a smart-ass you can be. You're a warrant officer now. You're stuck with it and that's the end of it.

Dan pauses and takes a long drag on his cigarette.

DAN:

Alright then sir. I know when I'm licked. So tell me then Colonel, what's the objective for this brilliant master plan?

Pierce wheels around and steps forward to face him.

PIERCE:

Vimy Ridge.

Dan is dumbstruck and unleashes another verbal assault.

DAN:

VIMY RIDGE?

VIMY FUCKIN' RIDGE!

That's impossible. Please tell me you're the one who's jokin' now.

PIERCE:

I am not joking! Those are our orders.

DAN:

(temper raging)

Wait just a damn minute. You're talkin' about chargin' into the teeth of the worst bloody killin' field in all Europe for Christ sake. Vimy Ridge is the same world of hell the French army impaled itself on barely a year ago.

PIERCE:

Yeah, I know and the Brits tried it twice and failed too.

DAN:

So together they lost what, a couple of hundred thousand, maybe a quarter million men?

(throws his arms up)

Colonel, with all due respect sir, maybe it's best we just concede this one and call it off. If a quarter million good men couldn't take that ridge, why in God's name does anybody think this puny little Canadian army of a hundred thousand can take it?

PIERCE:

Because we've got a better plan. A very good plan in fact. So believe me, Pully we are going to take that damn ridge.

DAN:

(exhausted)

Aw, c'mon Colonel. The Krauts can see for miles up there and they'll have that ground so well plotted they can hit every inch of it with machine gun fire. The barbed wire will be so thick you can't even see through it.

(takes another drag)

And we all know this too Colonel, the Krauts are very fucking good at this game. Up on that ridge are the same hard-ass sons-of-bitches who kicked the crap out of the best the French and British armies had to throw at them. They've been well dug in up there for two years and they mean to stay! Tell 'em to call it off Colonel and let's go fight somewhere where our boys have a decent chance to win.

Pierce slams his fist against a doorframe and shouts back.

PIERCE:

Mr. Pulbrook, I can't do that. There's no calling it off and there's no turning back.

(MORE)

PIERCE: (CONT'D)

Hell I've argued this all bloody week with every superior I can find. I even told General Currie himself that I think it's too tough. But you gotta know this, it's not his call and it sure as hell isn't mine. The commanding general of His Majesty's Forces have ordered us to take that ridge. Now, if you are all through with the lecture Mister Pulbrook, by God we are going up there and take that fucking ridge!

Dan stands silent then stares directly at Pierce.

DAN:

Then Colonel, I hope the hell you've got that plan right. I pray to God that just this once we've got the plan right.

INT. LONDON. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A drizzle of rain bounces against the windows. Grace is dressing behind a screen in a small examining room lit by a lamp on a corner table. She buttons up her blouse as the door swings open and a woman's voice calls from the other side of the screen.

DR. LIPTON:

Well Grace, I have the results whenever you are ready for them.

Grace emerges from behind the screen.

DR. LIPTON: (CONT'D)

I'm afraid it's every bit what you feared. My guess is that you are about six or seven weeks along.

Grace slides into the chair opposite the doctor and bites the corner of her lip in a vain attempt to hold back her tears. She drops her head and says nothing.

DR. LIPTON: (CONT'D)

Is the father at the front?

GRACE:

Yes.

DR. LIPTON:

Will he be pleased do you think?

GRACE:
Yes, I'm think he will.

DR. LIPTON:
And do you plan to marry him?

GRACE:
Probably not.

DR. LIPTON:
Is there a reason why not?

GRACE:
He already has a wife.

DR. LIPTON:
Oh, I see.
(pauses))
Do you have family who can help
you?

GRACE:
Not really. My parents are both
deceased and my only sister lives
in Rhodesia. My grandmother has
just passed away. I do have an
elderly aunt here in England.

Dr. Lipton stands slowly and moves to the window. She eases
back the curtains and speaks quietly.

DR. LIPTON:
Twenty-six people were killed in
last night's zeppelin raid. I
treated four young children. We had
to amputate one girl's leg, poor
sweet thing, she was barely eight.
The cruelty is unimaginable...
bombing innocent children. People
are genuinely terrified.

Grace clears her throat to engage in the conversation.

GRACE:
Yes, I know. Some are calling for
an immediate armistice.

Dr. Lipton turns from the window to look directly at Grace.

DR. LIPTON:
Do you plan to keep it?

GRACE:
I don't know yet, Dr. Lipton.

DR. LIPTON:

Grace, given our circumstances, I think we should drop the formalities. I do wish you'd call me Hillary.

After an extended pause, Grace begins to cry softly as Lipton slips into the chair opposite her.

HILLARY:

Grace, I will do for you as you wish but you must decide this quickly. You have less than two weeks before the decision will be made for you.

GRACE:

Yes Doctor...ah, Hillary. It's all become so complicated now. He's already gone back to France and I've just been transferred to the Queen Alexandra's.

DR. LIPTON:

The hospital ships?

GRACE:

Yes, they've promoted me Matron.

DR. LIPTON:

(smiles)

Well, you've certainly set a high standard.

A breath of silence follows and both women chuckle in relief.

GRACE:

I'll need a few days to think it all through. Will Wednesday be soon enough?

DR. LIPTON:

That will be fine. Try to keep your chin up. I see many more of these cases than you could ever imagine.

Grace wipes a tear away and looks straight at Hillary.

GRACE:

Thank-you Hillary, I can't tell you how much of a comfort you are. I really don't think a male doctor would ever be as understanding.

HILLARY:

The good news is those dragons are all at the front now. There are barely a hundred of us women and a battalion of old retirees left in all of England to deal with the entire civilian population.

GRACE:

Good God! Let's pray that it ends quickly for everyone's sake.

Hillary smiles and squeezes Grace's shoulder, turns and leaves the room, closing the door softly behind her. Grace eases back into her chair and weeps quietly.

INT. CANADIAN ARMY HEADQUARTERS IN FRANCE - DUSK

Dan is seated on a long bench sandwiched between two captains. Everyone jumps to attention as a stocky middle aged brigadier enters and steps up to stand on a podium beside a large easel holding a huge canvass covered map.

BRIGADIER RENYOLDS:

Good morning. As you were.

The men return to their seats.

REYONOLDS:

Gentlemen, although the outcome is still very much in doubt, this war is finally lurching toward an end.

(clears his throat)

Army intelligence is confident that the Russians are near to collapse and the Germans will soon be able to move thousands of troops from the eastern front to reinforce their positions here in France. As soon as those troops arrive the Germans will commence a final all-out attack to try to end the war. So we must take the initiative now before they can have that chance.

(pauses to allow the room to catch up)

Last week the German's openly threatened any American ship carrying arms or ammunition bound for Britain will be targeted by submarines.

(MORE)

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

Just last Wednesday they torpedoed one of our new hospital ships, the Glenart Castle, on her maiden voyage to Brest, killing everyone on board including doctors, nurses and crew.

Across the room pockets of men stand, wave their fists and shout abuses at "those horrible Kraut bastards".

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

Settle down now please. We have an important job to do and if we're successful we will do a lot more than avenge the Glenart Castle.

(pulls away the canvas)

This, gentlemen is our objective. Vimy Ridge!

A flood of low groans breaks out across the room. Unfazed, Reynolds raises the pointer and aims it at the map.

REYNOLDS:

You are very right to be concerned. As you know this mission has been tried and failed twice before. However, this time high command has specifically chosen us for this mission. So now the Canadian army is going up there to take and hold this damn ridge once and for all.

The room remains entirely silent.

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

(places pointer on map)

You can see here that the Vimy plateau is the only significant elevated ground for miles. But its most important military value is that it protects the Dovai coal fields behind it. Those coal fields are the richest reserves in northern Europe and supply half the coal needed to feed Germany's war machine. Which is precisely why they will do everything in their power to protect it. If we can deny the enemy that coal, their steel production will come to a halt in a matter of months. No steel, no guns, no shells, no submarines and finally, no war!

(turns to face the map)

(MORE)

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

We have labeled each of the three important crests along the ridge as your individual targets. They are Hills 145 and 125 and the smaller one over here is 120 is known to the French as 'The Pimple'.

(Reynold's smiles)

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

My adjutant thought we should rename it 'The Nipple'. He declared there wasn't a Canadian soldier alive who wouldn't charge hard after a naked nipple!

The men in the room break out in a round of laughter and applause. The Brigadier taps rapidly at the map again.

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

Now our aerial reconnaissance shows their heavy guns emplacements are here, here and here. Most are in concrete bunkers and there's heavy barbed wire stretched deep in front of each machine gun position.

(turns to face them again)

Some of you have asked about those large caliber naval guns that arrived here by rail last week. I can tell you that each of those guns can fire a round the size of a steer for six miles and drop it squarely on their pointy tin hats.

A rumble of chuckles of approval rolls across the room.

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

We are entirely confident that our artillery will cause so much damage ahead of you that the enemy will be content to just remain under cover until all the firing stops.

The room stays dead silent.

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

That's the artillery's set up punch, now for the infantry's knock out blow. The strength of our plan of attack falls to our ability to advance in the dark while our own guns lay down heavy fire directly in front of you.

(MORE)

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

At exactly 5 am on Easter Sunday, more than eleven hundred artillery pieces of all calibers will open up on their first targeted positions all across the enemy's lines. They'll keep firing in a moving barrage of precisely four minute intervals until all of their ammunition runs out. By noon we expect that we will have eliminated more than eighty per cent of the German artillery and machine gun positions along the ridge and smashed all that heavy barbed wire to bits.

(slows for effect)

Now gentlemen timing is the absolute the key to our success. While the artillery lays down heavy fire in front, every infantry regiment will be required to reach a specific target point during that four minute interval. All four infantry regiments of eighteen thousand shock troops will begin this attack along a single line five miles long. They will step off at exactly the same time, all headed for the same primary target, the far side of Vimy Ridge.

(pauses to take a breath)

Our objective is to minimize casualties by keeping the lines tight to ensure that everyone stays on time! And finally as a special incentive we are going to give the first company to claim that position on the far side of the ridge a full two week leave behind the lines in Brest.

A round of applause fills the room.

REYNOLDS: (CONT'D)

Thank-you gentlemen. Finally it's time now for us to hear from our commanding officer, General Currie who will wrap things up.

Dan recognizes the tall general as he steps forward in front of the small stage but he does not mount it. His uniform is rumpled and his voice is low and fatherly as he speaks.

GENERAL CURRIE:

When Command Headquarters asked me to take this on, I insisted that every ounce of the planning for this mission would be led by senior Canadian officers under my command. I want you to know that no one at Army Headquarters in London has challenged that requirement. It's very important for you to know that a victory here will mean a great deal to our Canadian Army. But most importantly, I want you to think about how much it will mean to our people at home. For three long years they have suffered nothing but agony and depravation from this war. I believe that a victory here will allow everyone at home to stand a little taller and smile a little brighter, knowing that their sons have succeeded where others have failed. It's a chance for all of Canada to celebrate our young country. So now it's your job to make sure that every man assembled here performs his duty and let's get this damn thing done for our folks at home.

Cheers ricochet throughout the tent.

EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM, BUFFALO - DAY

The train from Hamilton is just pulling in. People are gathering up their personal items getting ready to depart. Rose stays in her seat clutching her small leather bag as she stares out the window searching the platform. As the train is rolling to a halt the conductor is passing down the aisle barking orders and comments.

CONDUCTOR:

Buffalo, this is Buffalo New York. This is the final stop and everyone must depart. So all you stinking draft dodgers are safe for now. The Intercontinental from New York City will arrive here in fifteen minutes and there's a couple hundred people out there to greet her, so please leave the platform as quickly as you can.

Rose steps down from the train and stops to notice clusters of smiling young men and women. She hears Jake's voice calling from somewhere off to the right but she cannot locate him in the throng of faces.

JAKE:

Rose. Over here, Rose. Stay right there and I'll come to you.

A sudden parting of the crowd in front of her is accompanied by a series loud complaints.

MAN #1:

Hey! Watch it buddy!

MAN #2

Quit yer shovin'!

A minute later, Jake is standing in front of her grinning. She pauses just long enough to return his smile and throws her arms around him. He pulls her close.

ROSE:

Oh Jake, I was so worried you might not come.

JAKE:

You're even more beautiful than I remembered.

Jake bends down to kiss her. Rose feels her legs begin to buckle. Her suitcase falls to her feet. A group of three men are determined to push past them. One man shouts as he shoves hard against them.

FIRST MAN:

Hey buddy, take it to a hotel.

He jostles them so fiercely that Rose starts to lose her balance and steps on the bag at her feet. Jake recovers fast enough to pull her upright and in the same moment drives his left elbow firmly into the man's chin.

JAKE:

Back off buster or I'll brain ya!

A pair of policemen press forward down the platform and order the crowd to move back.

POLICEMAN #1

We've got three minutes 'til the Intercontinental arrives, so everybody not waiting for that train clear the platform now.

The three men back away to oblige the policeman but not without an long exchange of cold stares. Jake reaches down to retrieve Rose's battered suitcase and pulls her close by the waist. They delight in a quick smile and then make their way quickly toward the exit.

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM - DAY

Jake and Rose are lying naked on top of the bedcovers, their clothes tossed haphazardly across the room. Jake's arm is wrapped across Rose's waist as he glances up at the whirling ceiling fan.

JAKE:

That fan is a great invention. It keeps this whole room nice and cool.

ROSE:

Yes, it is wonderful!

JAKE:

We could use a couple million of them in California. Maybe I should look into it.

ROSE:

It is a good idea, but I thought you were going into the airplane business?

JAKE:

I am. Can you keep a secret?

ROSE:

(smiles)

I think I've already proven that.

JAKE:

I'm now an investor in the deal that's going to move the Curtis Airplane Company to southern California. Of course I'm not a major player, but I've got everything I own tied up in it.

ROSE:
Wow! That's terrific! When?

JAKE:
Not 'til after the war. They've got too many orders from the French Army to make that happen now.

Rose raises her head up to face him.

ROSE:
So what will you do until then?

JAKE:
Well, I've been learning to fly for one thing.

ROSE:
Just hanging around learning to fly? Shouldn't you be doing something more than that?

Jake props himself up on his right elbow and looks directly into her eyes.

JAKE:
I am doing something more, a big part of my job is to handle the clients, you know, keep 'em happy while they're over here.

ROSE:
You mean keeping a bunch of French generals amused while they're in America?

JAKE:
Yeah, well something like that. They usually bring along a few pilots, so it's helpful that I can speak their language.

Rose lays back down into the pillow and smiles.

ROSE:
It's so lovely and peaceful here. Just normal people getting on with their lives. No flags, no bands, no uniforms and no damn war. No gloom and doom, and no one is holding their breath waiting for a dreaded telegram. God, it's like heaven.

Jake laughs as he turns to face her.

JAKE:
Who would have ever thought of
Buffalo as heaven?

ROSE:
I do love you, Jake.

JAKE:
(whispers)
I love you too, Rose.

ROSE:
So tell me, what are we going to do
now?

JAKE:
Well, for now, you still have a
husband to think about and I've got
a business to tend to.

Rose lowers her head and nods.

ROSE:
I can't ever get a divorce while he
is at the front. But we will have
to make some plans soon.

JAKE:
Don't worry about it now Rose.
We'll figure it all out. How about
we just start with some dinner?

He reaches over to stroke her naked bottom.

JAKE: (CONT'D)
MMMMM! Lovely bum!

INT. CROWDED RESTAURANT, BUFFALO - NIGHT

Rose and Jake are seated at a corner table near the window.
Rose is happily watching people promenade on the street in
front of them.

ROSE:
It's so amazing just to sit and
watch so many happy people. No war
no worries. Oh Jake, I'm as happy
as I can ever remember!

JAKE:
Welcome to America Rose. To tell
you truth, I was worried that you
might not come.

(MORE)

JAKE: (CONT'D)

I probably shouldn't have asked you, after all, Danny is still my best friend. He saved my life and now I'm here with his wife. It's tough to get my head around. I know I had no right, but I just had to see you again.

ROSE:

I must admit I packed and unpacked and few times, but I just had to be with you again too.

An old waiter arrives and proceeds to pull the cork from a dusty bottle of red wine. He pours a small portion into Jake's glass. Jake smiles and slides the glass over to Rose.

JAKE:

No sir, tonight, we must allow the lady to approve it. After all, it's her special night.

Rose smiles, raises the glass slowly, closes her eyes and swallows.

ROSE:

MMM, it's lovely, thank-you!

JAKE:

It ought to be. It's a pre-war Beaujolais, an '0 nine.

The waiter fills their glasses, bows and retreats back into the dining room.

ROSE:

And just when did you become such a wine connoisseur?

JAKE:

Ever since I began dining with the French army.

The restaurant is packed. A single violinist is oblivious to all the noise. A round of applause erupts from a large table as the maître-d' delivers a huge white frosted cake topped with pink candles. A young woman glows as the cake is placed in front of her. Everyone at the table stands up and begins to sing loudly.

TABLE GUESTS:

"Happy Birthday, Dear Gladys..."

The voices ring across the room and drown out the poor violinist who stops playing in a moment of defeat.

TABLE GUESTS: (CONT'D)
 "Happy Birthday to you!"

Another round of applause follows. Rose is laughing as she takes in the happy scene and looks across at Jake, who is still applauding the birthday girl.

ROSE:
 This is why I wanted to leave
 England Jake. It's just all so
 normal and lovely!

JAKE:
 (tips his glass)
 Yes, you are Rose. Tonight you are
 the loveliest woman in the world.

ROSE:
 I'll bet you've used that line on
 every woman between here and
 California!
 (smiling)
 I will never forget this night,
 Jake, never!

A single tear falls down her cheek as she leans across the table to kiss his cheek. Their private moment is broken as their waiter returns.

JAKE:
 Here we go now. It's finally ready
 for your approval, madame.

The waiter struggles to maintain his balance while holding a large silver tray with his right arm while protecting a small service table slung over his left shoulder.

ROSE:
 I'm sure this will be a meal to
 remember.

JAKE:
 (watching the waiter)
 Lets hope for all the right
 reasons!

Jake winks as he eases himself forward to the edge of his chair just in case.

WAITER:
 (struggling)
 Another moment sir and your dinner
 will be served.

JAKE:
 No rush at all. We've got all the
 time in the world.

The waiter releases the folding table with his left hand and then deposits the tray on its center. Relieved, Jake eases back into his chair.

WAITER:
 (lifts the cover)
 Here we are, just as you ordered
 sir. Two broiled New York steaks,
 medium rare and a medley of fresh
 vegetables. These mushroom caps
 sautéed in red wine are compliments
 of the house!

Rose leans forward to take in the spread and smiles.

ROSE:
 I can't remember a meal this
 elegant since I left England.
 (She leans forward)
 You do know that I have no desire
 to go back to Canada. I want to
 spend the rest of my life right
 here with you.

JAKE:
 (looks into her eyes)
 That's my dream too. I swear I'll
 love you forever.

ROSE:
 You will have to take charge for us
 both from now on. I'm counting on
 you to make a plan for us to get to
 California.

JAKE:
 Don't worry, Rose, you're going to
 love it there. Everything will be
 perfect for us. I promise.

INT: INFANTRY TUNNEL, CANADIAN FRONT NEAR VIMY RIDGE - DAY

Dan and Mitch are walking next to a wall inside the holding tunnel.

As they step around a turn, they can hear shouts for mail call. Most of the men are huddled against the walls straining in the dim lantern light to read their letters from home and sharing an occasional photograph.

CORPORAL TANNER:

There you are! I've got some mail here for you two, a parcel for Sergeant Wilcox and two letters for the Sergeant-Major.

Mitch takes the brown paper parcel and Dan steps forward to take the envelopes.

DAN:

Thanks Corporal.

TANNER:

You're very welcome indeed, sir.

DAN:

And don't "sir" me.

TANNER:

No sir. I mean, yes sir. I won't 'sir' you no more. But you're an officer now and I'm supposed to 'sir' you.

MITCH:

(laughing)

He's got you there, "Sir".

DAN:

(snarls)

Well, I'll have none of it. Just one of you dumb asses "sirs" me again I'll have your hide!

MITCH:

(taken aback)

Ok, no problem, Pully. That's no problem at all.

Dan sits down with the two letters. The first is a standard army gray envelope from Canada. The other is a delicate blue square from England. He sets the gray envelope on the ground beside him. He pauses, to break the seal on the blue one as he leans forward to inhale the subtle whiff of her perfume. He holds his breath and unfolds the three sheets of blue tissue paper to read Grace's elegant script:

Grace: (v/o)

My Darling,

I awake each morning and reach for you only to find I am disappointed. I roll back, close my eyes to picture your smile. It's been barely six weeks since you departed but it already feels like a year.

I have two important items to share with you. I will endeavor to be as straightforward as possible, as both are fraught with emotion for me.

First, I am very happy to tell you that I have accepted a new position that is very exciting for me because I believe it means I may have a chance to see you again much sooner. The day after we parted, my CO approached me to enquire if I might be interested in joining a new medical unit that will transport the wounded directly home to England. I am very happy to report that I am to be a matron in the brand new Queen Alexandra's Medical Service. We began training last week and are just the third medical unit commissioned to provide ferry services for the wounded from France.

We'll be sailing from Avonmouth bound for Brest on a newly commissioned ship, HMS Glenart Castle in early April. We will have a full complement of four doctors, three dozen nurses, two clergy plus a crew of eleven.

Dan feels his heart stop cold and he can barely breathe.

DAN:

Oh God, Grace, No. Oh my God No.

He slumps forward and the pages fall to his side. Tears pour down his face. He hangs his head, closes his eyes and slips into prayer.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Dear God, please tell me she didn't suffer. Oh dear God, No. Grace.

After a few long moments, he lifts the pages to continue.

Grace (v/o continues):

There are rumours that some American newspapers say that the Germans claim our hospital ships are carrying ammunition to France so we are fair targets for their submarines. That, of course is absolute balderdash.

Some of the junior nurses have stirred these rumours to such frenzy that the anxiety here is palpable. I have told them that even the Germans must abide by the Geneva Convention so I hope everything will die down soon.

Darling, my other news is strictly private between the two of us. Simply put, we are no longer two but three. It seems, God has determined that our love does have a destiny after all. I shall deliver our child sometime in late November. I calculate that I can stay in the service until mid-September and will then return to stay with Aunt Phyllis.

I do have such wonderful plans for us. I should be arriving in Brest on the 12th of April. Please try to meet me there. You won't have any trouble finding us. Please come, Darling.

I will leave you with only one blissfully happy thought - Rhodesia. After this is over, we three can escape to join my sister at her ranch in Rhodesia.

*With all my love,
Forever,
Grace*

After several minutes of silent weeping, Dan regains his composure. He wipes his eyes and inhales heavily.

DAN: (CONT'D)

You rotten Kraut bastards! I'm gonna kill every last one of you rotten shits, every last stinkin' one I can find.

Dan re-folds the pages, tucks them back into the envelope, pulls it close to inhale her fragrance once last time and stands up slowly. He closes his eyes and quietly tucks the letter into the left breast pocket of his tunic. He turns to the second letter on the ground. He stares at it, folds it in half and shoves into his right front trouser pocket. He pauses as he hears a group of sergeants who are all chuckling as Mitch holds court.

MITCH:

That's my genius sister for ya. She sends me scarves, woolly gloves and heavy socks right at the start of spring. If she had a half a clue, she'd wait until October, but oh no, she wants to make sure I have to hump them all over France for the next six months. That our Gladys for ya, she's a genius, I tell ya, a genius.

EXT. CANADIAN TRENCHES - DUSK

The company is moving up for the assault. In single file they quick step out from their tunnels across a small rise and down into the trenches. A series of muffled cries erupt that causes the line to slam to a halt. Dan springs forward, pushing hard on the shoulders of the men in front of him.

DAN:

Make a hole, I'm coming through!

He quickly spots the hold-up and recognizes the pock-marked face of private Ray Beckner who is wrestling with Mitch over a small canvass bag.

MITCH:

Gimme that bag, you fuckin' ogre!

BECKNER:

That's my own private property
Sergeant, so you just leave it be.

MITCH:

Not a fuckin' chance. I'm gonna
have your ass this time, Beckner,
you trophy huntin' son of a bitch.

Mitch wrenches Beckner's arm down hard causing the bag to spill to the ground. Dan pulls up beside Mitch and looks down at his heap of treasure.

DAN:

That is fucking disgusting!

BECKNER:

Just the spoils of war, sir.

Dan and Mitch bend down to retrieve the loot, including several wedding rings, a dozen gold teeth and a half dozen gold crosses. They toss them all back into the canvass bag.

DAN:

(nods to Mitch)

Hang on to this for the provost
marshal. We'll deal with this
bastard later.

Dan reaches down for one last piece. He swallows hard as he recognizes his own battered pocket watch. It is heavily scratched and compacted with dirt but after a couple of wipes with his thumb he flips it open. He holds his breath as the faded photo of Rose appears. He turns to look directly at Beckner and growls in a low whisper.

DAN: (CONT'D)
Just where the hell did you get
this?

Beckner clears his throat and grins hesitantly.

BECKNER:
I found it in a trench back at
Arras.

DAN:
You better pray you die this day or
I'm gonna find you and rip your
theivin' heart out!

Suddenly a voice bellows from above them.

COLONEL PIERCE:
What the hell is going on here?

In desperation Beckner looks up to make his appeal.

BECKNER:
He's gonna kill me. Colonel sir.
Pulbrook, says he's gonna kill me.

PIERCE:
Well I promise I'm going to shoot
every damn one of you myself if you
don't get moving up here and fast.

Pierce snaps his swagger stick and points it directly at Dan.

PIERCE: (CONT'D)
Pulbrook, you get these men up into
that trench and I mean right now.
The goddamn artillery is due to
start in just three minutes.

Pierce wheels around and charges over the rise with his small
entourage in tow. Mitch shoves Beckner hard toward the trench
and yells into his face.

MITCH:
You heard the man. Now get your
filthy ass into that trench.

DAN:
MOVE IT OUT, ALL OF YOU. RIGHT NOW.

As the men rush forward down into the trench, Dan looks at
the watch and closes it. He carefully tucks it in his pocket
next to Grace's letter.

EXT. TWO WOMEN ARE WALKING FROM A CHURCH IN HESPLER - DUSK

Rose and Lily are heading home from choir practice. They hear an old dog growl feebly in the distance.

LILY:
Must be the Dory's old mutt Rusty.
They've probably shut him out
again. He sounds just like Mrs.
Lindsay did tonight.

ROSE:
(chuckling)
I'm certain she's tone deaf.
Everything coming out of her mouth
is flatter than linseed oil.

LILY:
Remember before the war how
difficult the auditions were to
qualify for the choir? Now they'll
take anyone with a pulse.

ROSE:
Poor Sally would roll over in her
grave if she'd heard her botching
that refrain tonight.

LILY:
Sally was the best alto we ever
had.

They stop as they reach Rose's porch and Rose digs out a key from her jacket pocket.

ROSE:
How about a nice glass of beer?

LILY:
Ok, but just one, I'm watching my
figure.

ROSE:
All the men at the mill say it's a
lovely figure to watch.

LILY:
Ugh! They're all a bunch of ugly
old rogues and slackers, nothing
like the good men we sent to war.

ROSE:
I'll drink to that Lily m'dear.

They walk through the living room to the kitchen, tossing their coats and hats over the backs of a couple of chairs.

ROSE: (CONT'D)

You know there was a day when I would have barked at anyone who tossed clothes around in my house.

LILY:

I know what you mean. I used to badger my Bill every day about hangin' up his coat and wiping his boots.

ROSE:

He's a great looking man, your Bill, the handsomest man in Hespler, I should think.

Lily blushes and looks up coyly from the rim of her glass.

LILY:

He's more than just handsome Rose. He's also a very talented man, if you follow my meaning.

Rose smiles in anticipation.

ROSE:

Oh, do tell, Luv. Just what are the best of his "talents"?

Lily grins and blushes as she leans forward.

LILLY:

I'll just leave that to your imagination, but let's just say he always kept me from sleeping late.

Rose's grin broadens. The two clink glasses and sip their beer.

ROSE:

What is the latest from your Bill? Is he still at the front?

LILY:

Oh, he's the stalwart type, steadfastly carrying on. He'd never complain. Did I tell you he was promoted corporal?

ROSE:

At least twice and awarded a medal too, I think you said.

LILY:

The King's Cross for bravery. They say it's nearly impossible for an artillery man to get a medal for bravery under fire, but my Bill did.

ROSE:

Not only glamorous, but a war hero too.

Lily takes another sip of beer, longer this time. She brings the near-empty glass back down slowly and looks directly into it as if measuring the last of its contents.

ROSE: (CONT'D)

Oh, come on, out with it now Luv. What's troubling you, Lil?

Lily continues to stare at the glass as a tear falls down her left cheek. Rose inhales quietly and whispers as she reaches out to touch her hand.

ROSE: (CONT'D)

How bad can it be?

LILY:

The worst! I think I'm about nearly three months gone.

Rose is momentarily stunned and struggles to speak.

ROSE:

Oh my God, Lily!

Rose clasps her hand tighter and speaks slowly.

ROSE: (CONT'D)

You've certainly hidden it well.

LILY:

A friend told me that tall women don't seem to show as much early on.

(looks down)

I've been attempting to cover up as much as possible with a bunch of layers.

After an extended pause Rose quietly asks the question.

ROSE:
So tell me then Lily, who's the
father?

Lily leans back into the chair and looks up to the ceiling. She begins to sob softly and shakes her head slightly as the tears start to pour down her face.

ROSE: (CONT'D)
Who is it, Lily? Who's done this to
you?

Lily hesitates then blurts out an answer.

LILY:
Rory Donovan.

Rose gasps as she eases back in her chair.

ROSE:
You mean that lazy black-eyed Irish
millwright on the night shift? The
loud mouth who's always demanding a
free Ireland and stands against
Britain and the war?

Lily nods slowly and Rose continues her questioning.

ROSE: (CONT'D)
Did he force you Lil? Did he rape
you?

Lily inhales again and looks straight into Rose's eyes.

LILY:
No Rose, he didn't. It happened
only once but I went willingly.

Rose lowers her eyes, exhales and shakes her head.

LILY: (CONT'D)
I'm so ashamed. How could I have
been such a fool?

Rose pushes back and slowly gets to her feet. She walks over to the chair to retrieve a handkerchief from her coat.

LILY: (CONT'D)
Oh Rose, I am so sorry. I've let
everyone down, you especially.

Rose leans forward, kisses her cheek and then walks slowly over to the window and stares out into the night.

LILY: (CONT'D)
 Poor Bill, he's so very proud.
 This will just kill him.

More sobbing before she can resume.

LILY: (CONT'D)
 He's been gone so long and I've
 been so very lonely. I pray for him
 every night, write to him all the
 time. I can't keep going on and on
 alone like this forever with no end
 in sight.
 (pause)
 I just wanted to feel loved again.
 I needed to be loved. Oh, Rose,
 forgive me, please forgive me.

Rose remains facing the window and lowers her head.

ROSE:
 Oh my poor sweet Lily, there's
 nothing to forgive. We've all felt
 that way at some point. It's all
 just this endless, bloody
 godforsaken war.

INT. HESPLER COTTAGE - DAWN

Rose tiptoes down the stairs heading for the kitchen. She pauses and pulls the quilt up over Lily as she slumbers on the sofa. Rose begins to collect some of the clothing still scattered about. She spots a small beige envelope from yesterday's mail that had fallen beside the umbrella stand. She lifts open the flap and unfolds the two sheets of wrinkled paper.

JAKE: (VOICE OVER)
My Darling Rose,

*You will have guessed from the
 postmark that I am writing to you
 from France. I have no excuses, but
 like Danny, I knew at some point,
 I'd have to do my share to try to
 end this horrible bloody war.*

*It won't come as a surprise that
 I've enlisted to fly with the
 Lafayette Escadrille.*
 (MORE)

JAKE: (VOICE OVER) (CONT'D)

We are quite a notorious group, a squadron of Yanks fighting in one of the most elite air regiments in the French army. I've been training here for about a month and they're about to send us on our first reconnaissance mission over enemy lines.

I know you are now probably as angry with me as you were with Dan but I just couldn't live with myself anymore if I didn't at least try to pitch in.

Rose turns away through the small window as the morning rain pelts down then returns to turn to the second page.

JAKE: (VOICE OVER CON'T) (CONT'D)

When we were together, you asked me to take charge for us from now on. I know that you do love me and we both dream of a life together in California, but I also know that as angry as you may be, you still love Danny too. You are a strong woman and I'm confident that you will make the right choice for us all when the time comes.

I have thought many times about our wonderful night together in Buffalo. I want you to know that I will never forget it.

You might not want to hear this Rose, but I do love you deeply and I shall for the rest of my life.

*Forever and always,
Jake*

She steps quietly over to the tiny desk. She lifts a sheet of paper and an old fountain pen from a drawer and hesitates for a brief moment over the page and then begins to write.

ROSE:

My Darling Jake...

EXT. CANADIAN TRENCHES IN FRONT OF VIMY RIDGE FRANCE - DUSK
(APRIL 8, 1917)

The heavy gunfire pulverizes the ground ahead for three miles. Eight hundred soldiers of the Royal Canadian Regiment are hunkered down in their trenches embracing the wooden floors. Their faces are flush with terror as the bitter taste of cordite falls back around them. In small clusters soldiers quietly exchange their thoughts as they wait for the order to step out.

HARRY:

My God Jim, we're going to have to crawl through some huge friggin' craters, bigger'n anything we've ever seen before!

JIM:

At least we know there won't be any Krauts in them. An ant couldn't survive this shellin'!

HARRY:

I'd gladly change places with that ant right now!

This morning some men weep quietly while others simply pray, paralyzed in fear.

Private Michael Denvir whispers a catholic intervention.

PRIVATE DENVIR:

"Bless me Father, for I have sinned..."

At the far end of the trench Anglican Captain Leese raises his arms to pray for their immortal souls.

REVEREND LEESE:

Oh Lord, God of Hosts, we pray thee strengthen and protect these brave soldiers of our young nation. Endow them with thy courage and might to perform their duty on this day, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

VOICES ACROSS THE TRENCHES:

AMEN.

Dan and Mitch hover together while listening as Corporal David Shiffman recites his psalm.

CORPORAL SHIFFMAN:

*I shall not want. He maketh me to
lie down in green pastures...*

MITCH:

All the amens and halleluiahs in
the world won't save our asses now.
No God, no Christ, no redemption,
no choice and no fuckin' chance.
We're all done, every last stinkin'
one of us. Done.

Suddenly the entire front explodes in a blinding fireball.
The eruption lifts everyone two inches off the ground.

DAN:

The navy guns. With any luck
they'll blast those Kraut bastards
all the way to Dusseldorf.

Mitch raises up to wave his fist and call into the dark.

MITCH:

GO, BABIES, GO! Kill every one of
those Gerry mutha-fuckers. Make 'em
all disappear.

In one final relay of fire, all three thousand guns harmonize
as one. The smoke and cordite flow back toward the trenches
in waves so thick that many men fall down coughing.

DAN:

(stands and shouts)
UP MEN, HERE WE GO NOW BOYS. FOLLOW
ME.

Charging up the ladder, Dan counts helmets out loud as they
step up. In less than a minute the men have all scrambled out
of the trench and laid down behind him.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Fifty-seven, fifty-eight, fifty-
nine...

He roars out as loud as possible.

BAYONETS!

His subordinates then relay the message across the line.

SUBORDINATES:

BAYONETS!

Each man stands and swings an eighteen-inch blade out from its scabbard. All eyes are fixed on Dan as he belts out the next order.

DAN:
SPREAD OUT IN FOURS AND FOLLOW ME.

Hunched forward the men take their first few steps forward to pursue Dan into the dark. The guns start again and tear a continuous line of exploding ground. Dan turns briefly and begins to trot. Sixty men all begin to chase him forward.

SEARGEANT DAVIS:
That's the style men! Nice and tight now boys, here we go. At the double quick now, keep in step!

Dan halts and to listen for an occasional calling whisper and the crashing of hobnailed boots hammering on the gravel behind him.

SEARGEANT CLARK:
STAY TOGETHER NOW BOYS, THAT'S IT.
NICE AND TIGHT IN FOURS. FORWARD
TOGETHER NOW BOYS. HERE WE GO.

The silence barely lasts a few seconds before a new fury of gunfire erupts. More bright orange and blue flashes rip into the dark ahead leaving thick lines of gray smoke as bile surges to the top of many throats. Six minutes into the attack there is still no response from the Germans. The creeping barrage of the short guns has pinned the enemy troops deep into their trenches.

Every Canadian soldier stepping untouched across no man's land inhales a quiet relief.

PRIVATE DENVIR:
Good God almighty! Those poor miserable devils!

Somewhere off to his left, Dan is the first to hear the notorious chatter of a 30-millimeter Mauser, a machine gun that can control an arc of ground for fifty yards around it.

DAN:
Sons of bitches! Who forgot to tell those bastards to stay home?

He turns back into the dark and shouts.

DAN: (CONT'D)
 OK Boys, we're goin' to take that
 machine gun out right now! Sergeant
 Clark?

From somewhere in the rear Sergeant Clark calls out.

SERGANT CLARK:
 Right behind you, Sargnmajr.

DAN:
 You take your guys to the right and
 I'll bring the rest in from the
 left. Last one in buys the beer.

SERGANT CLAKK:
 As if anyone gives a shit about a
 fuckin' beer right now!

DAN:
 Well, I always give a shit about a
 fuckin' beer.

Twenty yards away Clark grins and turns to signal his five
 clusters of four to follow him around to the right.

SERGANT CLARK:
 We're heading out now!

As soon as Dan can hear them moving, he signals to the rest
 of the company to follow him as he crawls away to his left.
 Mitch gathers up his men together to follow Dan to the left
 with Beckner trailing alone as usual at the rear.

Ninety seconds later Beckner is blown skyward by an errant
 mortar round and flung hard into a run of barbed wire.
 Trapped like a puppet he is hung up with his back toward the
 German trench. The rest of the men push past him without
 stopping. One pauses barely long enough to sneer.

PASSING SOLDIER:
 You hang in there now Beckner, you
 horrible bag of shit. Maybe we'll
 come back for ya, but I fuckin'
 doubt it!

In a vain attempt to wiggle free he begins to scream like a
 child, vainly shaking his limbs in a wild panic.

BECKNER:
 HELP ME SOMEBODY. DEAR GOD,
 SOMEBODY PLEASE HELP ME!

In final desperation Beckner manages to wriggle one shoulder loose from the wire just before the machine gun tears him to shreds.

EXT. VIMY RIDGE - PRE-DAWN

The steady rain doubles the misery of the soldiers moving forward in the dark.

The artillery has laid down tremendous waves of fire, but a few pockets of fire begin to erupt from the German lines. Dan turns back and waves his arms to signal his unseen men to hit the dirt. He pauses briefly in a shallow pothole barely deep enough to cover his head let alone his butt.

Through the yellow light of two star shells he can make out the silhouette of a machine gun's crew of four men. In those brief seconds he could hear their panicked screams as they fired blindly into the dark.

GERMAN GUN CREW:

(in German)

Get back to hell you rotten Tommy bastards!

The gun crew is blindly blasting away nervously in a narrow arch of fire that leaves their flanks exposed. Dan could see that the only way to avoid their random fire was to move even further around to his left.

Every one of his men is pressed on his belly trying to avoid the explosion of rock and mud slamming down in front of them. About sixty feet from the enemy trench Dan slips up to his knees and quickly chops out an eight foot wide strand of barbed wire with a pair of old of wire cutters and whispers a call out to his men.

DAN:

C'mon boys, here we go now! Fast and clean through the wire. Follow me!

He slides forward through the wire and down into the trench, then gritting his teeth, he races in a blind fury toward the gun. He can hear the roar of the men behind him now screaming like banshees as they dive down into the trench behind him.

Suddenly, ten feet in front of him a bunker door opens out toward him. From behind the door he can see a man easing his head out like a weary rabbit.

Dan sprints three strides to the doorframe and throws himself sideways slamming the door shut hard. He loses his balance but the edge of the door has smashed against the German's neck. As he stands back up he sees that blood has begun to gush from his nose and mouth, triggering a distinct suffocating gurgle. Without breaking stride a soldier charging hard from behind Dan fires a single merciful round into the German's face and then races on past him.

A young corporal running third in file stops to throw the body backward into the bunker. Then he pulls the pin on a grenade, tosses it through the doorway and slams the door shut. The blast blows the door back open, shattering the opposite trench wall and sending the corporal flying up and back down into the trench where he lands hard.

Knocked down from behind, Dan stumbles up on all fours. The soldier who raced past him is dead. He turns slowly and stares straight up into the muzzle of the machine gun.

Barely twenty feet ahead behind a wall of sandbags, the gun crew scrambles to reposition the tripod while their eyes remain fixed on the men who had just penetrated their lines. They scream a continuous run of insults and wave their fists at them. The German sergeant screams straight at Dan.

GERMAN SERGEANT:

(in German)

Come on up here you English pig and
you can eat shit for breakfast!

They re-set the weapon back on its tripod and begin to aim the muzzle squarely down at the squad of men now trapped in their trench. Dan jumps up and charges wildly in a death race toward the gun. His left hand reaches back to his belt for his own grenade but discovers it's missing.

Bracing his rifle against his chest in a full charge position he sidesteps the two bodies and continues his run. The enemy gun crew levels its weapon and begins to fire. A single short burst sends thirty rounds ricocheting off the walls just above Dan's head. He stumbles forward flailing his arms around his ears in a dive for cover.

Suddenly a huge explosion terminates the machine gun fire. The explosion sends Dan sailing backward across the deck, spilling his rifle forward, away from him. A second blast of smoke sends up shards of wood that choke the air. A blackened hand flies past his face followed by a soaring length of boot that floats directly toward his head.

Stunned and horrified he leans back to exhale then stops to search everywhere for pain but finds none.

He inhales hard again, stifles another urge to vomit and rolls his shoulders hard before he rises up to his knees. He glances up just as two of his soldiers from Davis' "A" company climb up into the nest from the far side. They briefly scan around to confirm their kill. One of them waves a half-salute in Dan's direction and then steps back to disappear into the night.

Breathing heavily Dan leans back against the trench wall and turns to look back down into trench. Eight men stare up at him, all are aghast and breathless, most are still in shock. Many of the men had been sprayed below the waist with blood and some, like Dan, have dark red splotches pasted to their faces. They begin to stand up and start to prepare their weapons for the next round. Dan grimaces as he glances down quickly at his wrist watch. They are running exactly three minutes behind.

DAN:

Up, men, up. We gotta keep on movin'. We're running late.

Further down the line, Dan hears the rasping bark of Sergeant Wilcox.

MITCH:

Check your weapons and get ready to move out.

Dan breaths a sigh of relief, someone else can take the lead for the next while. He knows that he is near ready to collapse, his knees start to buckle and he can barely stay focused. He pauses for just a minute and struggles to speak.

DAN:

Move them out now Sarg'n Wilcox.

Without a rifle Dan steadies himself and looks down to recheck his revolver. His hands are shaking so badly that he drops two bullets. He reaches down to pick them up when a young private pushes down past him to retrieve them.

PRIVATE DENVIR:

Here you go sir. That was a hell of a thing you done, there sir, just a hell of a thing!

Dan stares at the boy as he shoves the bullets into their chambers and thrusts the gun back into its holster. Just as Denvir starts to step away Dan angrily catches him by the arm and grabs the barrel of his rifle.

DAN:

Gimme that! When the sergeant says to check your weapon, you gotta look the damned thing over. This fucking thing is so full of muck and shit it's gonna blow up right in your damn face!

Dan cocks the weapon and throws the rifle hard against the parapet. "Bang!" The explosion that follows drops every man in the trench back down in a panic. The rifle barrel is shattered in the blast. A pause of terror is immediately followed by a series of angry shouts from the men as they stagger back up to their feet.

VOICES FROM THE TRENCH

Jesus H Christ!
Holy Shit!
What the fuck was that?

The boy stands paralyzed. Dan reaches to retrieve the rifle to his left and steps over to snarl at the young soldier.

DAN:

You take good care of this rifle, now boy. It's from the man who died to save your fuckin' life. A real hero! Fuck it up and I'll kick the hell out of you myself.

The boy looks down at the weapon and stares back at Dan terrified. He exhales slowly in a long blow and speaks quietly to the boy.

DAN: (CONT'D)

All right now boy, do like the sergeant says, move it out.

As the boy stumbles forward, Dan lifts his head back up, now clear-eyed and resilient. He clenches his teeth and growls back into the dark.

DAN: (CONT'D)

UP AND OUT, YOU MISERABLE SONS A BITCHES. WE'RE LATE AND WE'VE GOT A LOT MORE WORK TO DO THIS NIGHT.

INT. ROSE'S HOUSE, HESPLER - DAY

Rose runs down the stairs as the old clock above the piano chimes twice. A woman bursts through the front door bringing with her a blast of cold air and sleet.

Lucy stamps her feet and shakes her hat.

LUCY:
Good Lord, that's a brutal day out
there!

Rose stares at her anxiously. a

ROSE:
Lucy! Thank God you're back, but
where's Doctor Morgan?

Lucy doesn't answer, she unbuttons her heavy woolen coat and hangs it over the railing and turns to face Rose.

LUCY:
Doctor Morgan won't be coming.
He's still at the hospital.

ROSE:
But he promised he'd be here by one
o'clock.

Lucy shakes her head and continues quietly.

LUCY:
You should see it over there. Sick
and dying people everywhere.
They're sayin it's the Spanish Flu,
maybe an epidemic. They've lost
four since Saturday. Poor old Doc
is out on his feet.

ROSE:
But what are we going to do? That
baby is coming soon and Lily will
need a doctor for sure. She's at
least three weeks early.

LUCY:
Doc said we'll have to handle it as
best we can. He said there isn't
much to it, just help to ease the
head out and when it comes then
catch it. Wait for the rest to
come out then cut the chord and tie
it off with a silk thread.
(pauses)
He got angry when I tried to push
him. He said there was nothing to
it, that women have been having
babies without doctors since the
beginning of time.

ROSE:

But she's so weak and she's been sick as a dog for two weeks. She's up there now running a fever and the pains are coming every half hour.

LUCY:

It doesn't matter Rose. We're all she's got now, so we'd better get up there and give her our best.

Rose hangs her head for a moment then exhales slowly.

ROSE:

Poor sweet Lily! My God, I pray she's strong enough to get through this.

Lucy finishes toweling her hair and takes Rose by the arm at the bottom of the stairs.

LUCY:

There's one more piece of news I heard it at the hospital. They say our boys are in the fight of their lives somewhere in France, some place called Vimy Ridge.

ROSE:

Every fight is for fight of their lives. What's so different about this one?

LUCY:

They say they're all alone this time. The Brits and the French are stayin' clear of it. Too damned tough for them the papers all say.

ROSE:

No doubt. That's why they'd leave our guys to be slaughtered while they stay clear of it. Goddam British army!

Lucy continues on then begins to sob.

LUCY:

They're saying the whole Canadian army is up there, all of them there at once. That means my boy Andy is there and your Danny will be there too.

Rose's response is quick and sarcastic.

ROSE:

Oh, there's no doubt at all. Danny could never stay out of a big brawl like that.

The two women don't speak for a moment. They simply stand and hug. A soft moan from upstairs pulls them back to reality. Rose wipes her eyes with her apron and looks up the stairs.

ROSE: (CONT'D)

I'll get some more towels. You'd better wash up and boil more water.

EXT. EASTER MORNING 1917 VIMY RIDGE - PRE-DAWN

DAN:

Pass the word, all NCO's report to me, now!

In seconds a cluster of four sergeants and five corporals gather in a trench, shoulder to shoulder, around Dan.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Head count?

Moving clockwise and heads lowered each man responds in order.

MITCH:

Just seven still standing.

CORPORAL GRAHAM:

I got eight.

NCO VOICES IN SUCCESSION:

Seven, nine, seven, six.

Sergeant Davis is the last to speak, He lowers his head and exhales loudly.

SERGEANT DAVIS:

Just me and the boy scout. We lost most of 'em to that fuckin' machine gun.

DAN:

Anybody seen Clark's bunch?

No one spoke. A couple of men lower their heads. After an extended pause, Dan clears his throat.

DAN: (CONT'D)
Alright then. Forty-six in all.

SEARGANT DAVIS:
Forty-seven. Countin' you sir.

DAN:
That's right, forty-seven and no
"sirs" around here, Davis. You all
remember that or I'll toss you out
of here head first.

Davis can't hide his frustration.

DAVIS:
What the hell do we call you then?
If you ain't a 'sir', then who the
hell are ya?

DAN:
"Sargnmajr" is still plenty good
enough for you buncha bums.

Dan eases down among them and pulls out his bayonet and starts to lay out a sketch in the dirt beside him.

DAN: (CONT'D)
Let's get ready to charge over the
top. You can bet they'll be movin'
up reinforcements soon and we gotta
get there before they do. So here's
what we're gonna do. We'll split
into three parties.

He scratches out a plan at their feet.

DAN: (CONT'D)
Here's the trench we're in now and
here's that pillbox up on the
right. We're gonna leave here at
three separate times from these
points. I'll lead from the center.
Mitch, from the right and Davis
from the left.

Dan sets the bayonet lengthwise and continues the instructions as he rotates the blade on its edge.

DAN: (CONT'D)
We're gonna sashay up there in a
series of quick obliques until we
all get to about fifty feet in
front of that pillbox.

(MORE)

DAN: (CONT'D)

Then we're gonna charge at it from three sides at once like a bunch of wild demons straight from Hell.

Dan stands up quickly and looks at each one of them.

DAN: (CONT'D)

If we go fast we still have the advantage of them starin' out into the dark for us. We head out about a minute apart, keep 'em tight together and move fast.

(Dan looks to the target)

Those bastards up there have gotta be hurtin' and scared. We have this one chance to get up there and take this fuckin' pimple before they can get fully re-enforced and wipe us all out. So, this is a foot race now boys, let's pull it together and get this done or we're all be dead in half an hour.

Dan glances around at the small circle of faces all staring up at him, each nods their head in fearful unison.

DAN: (CONT'D)

RIGHT. UP AND OUT, LET'S GO!

Shrinking low from the pounding of the heavy gunfire Dan steps forward and away from the group. His eyes blazing from the dark, he cups his hands to his mouth and screams back down toward the cluster of heads trailing behind him.

DAN: (CONT'D)

BAYONETS!

The NCO's scramble back to their men, pulling them together in bunches of six, calling names and yelling orders. Every man in unison rechecks his bayonet and grits his teeth.

DAN: (CONT'D)

ON ME!

Two corporals pull a dozen men forward toward him. They gang up around him as he begins to speak in a low hush.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Now listen boys, we're gonna take that fuckin' pillbox right there in front of us. The others will meet us up there and then we're goin' right over the top.

In a sense of panic some of the men just stare down at their feet. Dan grins at them and teases.

DAN: (CONT'D)

What's the matter boys, you never slipped over a French ridge before? Ya know what's over there? Its their officers fuckin' mess over there. It/s Easter and they've all been celebrating! They've got roast pig, barrels of really good wine, and lines of French whores all reserved for those fuckin' senior officers. Now we're goin' over there and take it all from 'em and young Dick Webster here gets to pick the first whore.

A series of snickers follows as they all turn to Private Webster, the most pious catholic in the company.

CORPORAL THOMAS:

Buckle up yer tin hat, Dicky boy.
It's gonna be your big day!

Dan stands on the firing step and looks down the line.

DAN:

Mitch, you set?

MITCH:

Let's get goin' Pully before we change our minds.

Dan turns to his left and squints hard but can't see a thing past the two men closest to him. He cups his hands to his mouth and shouts into the dark.

DAN:

Davis?

The sergeant calls back from the shadows.

SEARGANT DAVIS:

Ready when you are. Let's get movin'.

Dan exhales hard and scans the faces next to him. He forces himself to speak as quietly and calmly as possible.

DAN:

C'mon boys, let's get this done.
MOVE OUT!

Without looking back, Dan steps out of the trench toward the dawn's first stream of light.

He can hear the NCO's quietly urging the men forward. They all tumble out of the trench in tight order. As they push forward, they spot a single German who jumps up from behind some wreckage and races towards the shrouded pillbox.

PRIVATE COOPER:
What the hell is that?

PRIVATE PERCY:
It's the Easter Bunny!

Dan grins and follows the line of humour.

DAN:
Let's go get 'im, and we'll all
have fresh rabbit for breakfast!
At the quick step now, let's go!

They all rise up to crouch in unison to begin a determined hundred-yard dash toward the pillbox. Reaching the top of a small rise, the evidence of the massive artillery barrage is ghastly. Mitch's bunch gathers around a destroyed short-range gun and a myriad of limbs and body parts strewn about throughout the debris field.

SOLDIER'S VOICE:
God bless the Royal Navy!

Dan is the first to reach the corner of the pillbox. He looks back to see Thomas and Percy scrambling up from behind a pile of debris. They relay race forward to join him at the wall. The soft haze of first light betrays nothing, there is no sound, no breeze, not a whisper anywhere.

CORPORAL THOMAS:
Too quiet.

PERCY:
It's Easter morning. Maybe we
should let 'em sleep a little
longer.

THOMAS:
I'll put 'em right back to sleep,
you just watch!

DAN:
Damn right Henry. We'll give 'em
the sleep of the ages and right
fuckin' now!

Dan looks back over his left shoulder to see a group of men twenty yards behind moving carefully up behind them. They are silent as they slide from one dark shadow to the next. Dan holds his face tight against the wall, straining hard to listen for a sound from inside. He whispers his next orders.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Weapons only now, dump everything else, when we get round the front we're gonna race straight for those big doors. Keep your eyes on the shoulder of the man in front of you and remember we promised to bag an officer for the colonel.

Dan pauses and stares directly into Percy's eyes and exhales in a long slow blow.

DAN: (CONT'D)

No point in waitin'. Let's go!

Dan drops down beside the wall and steps quietly to his right and rounds the corner, the rest follow in order. Through the first flickers of dawn, they snake their way up the rise toward the pillbox. Just as they go forward the drizzle becomes a downpour. Dan mutters to himself in disgust.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Aw, what the hell's next?

He looks to his right and signals the hard charge for the corner. Footsteps race up closely behind him and he can feel a man's breath at the back of his neck.

In the early morning light, they can see that the pillbox has been hit hard, but it is not destroyed. Chunks of plaster lay scattered on the ground leaving the roof trusses fully exposed.

There are no visible signs of life, just a few muffled voices coming from inside. Four feet from the doorframe Dan stops, draws his pistol and without looking back waves a signal for the others to close up behind him.

Then out of the blue a face pushes slowly around the opposite corner. Dan knows he is exposed and would never get back in time. He holds his breath, closes his eyes then exhales heavily in relief when he recognizes a tommy helmet.

Suddenly the door of the pillbox swings wide open covering Mitch and the other man entirely.

A German voice screams from inside:

(MORE)

DAN: (CONT'D)

German voice:
ALARME, ALARME!

Dan races forward then crashes his right boot hard against the door. Mitch and three others are pressed against the wall on the opposite side of the doorframe. Rifle fire erupts from inside the doorway, followed by the "ping" from a grenade pin and a thud as it rolls out beside Dan's feet.

He freezes in his tracks as a blur of khaki flies past him. In a single movement, an arm retrieves the grenade and tosses it back down into the pillbox. The blast tears through the morning stillness and sends a shower of smoke back out through the door.

Mitch yells to the enemy inside.

MITCH:

You rotten sons a bitches, now
you're gonna die!

Dan stretches his memory for his only lines of German and shouts into he pillbox.

DAN:

HANDE HOCHE! MACHTE SCHNELL!

He begins to step down into the smoke filled room. A young German turns and stares up at him and whimpers a plea.

GERMAN SOLDIER:

Nein, nein! Bitte nein!

The soldier spills over face down still clenching his stomach and rolls to his side. From the far end of the room, an older voice coughs through the maze of dust and smoke.

GERMAN OFFICER:

NICHT SHEISSEN! BITTE NICHT
SCHEISSEN. NO SHOOT! NO SHOOT!

DAN:

RAUS, RAUS! HANDE HOCHE!
Come on out of there you rotten
Kraut bastards.

Two arms poke out from the smoke followed slowly by a man who is still coughing. Stunned by the explosion, the man stands silently with his head lowered as blood runs from his ears. Dan recognizes his shoulder boards, a Major from the artillery corps. He grabs him by the tunic and points his pistol directly to his head and pushes him hard toward two of his men.

DAN: (CONT'D)
 Hang on to this son of a bitch.
 He's the prize we promised Pierce.

A pudgy old captain is next out followed closely by a tall lieutenant. As the captain reaches the door, the lieutenant pulls a pistol from the back his belt. He then fires a single shot that hits Corporal Thomas squarely between the eyes, killing him instantly.

Mitch instantly drives his bayonet into the lieutenant's throat. He twists it hard leaving the man nearly decapitated. He recovers the weapon and drives the rifle butt hard into the fat captain's chin. The old German collapses to his knees and begs for his life as he groans and rolls to his left.

GERMAN CAPTAIN:
 NEIN, BITTE, BITTE!

Danny and Mitch stand frozen beside each other for a few seconds, both breathing hard. Sergeant Davis whistles as he speaks quietly.

DAVIS:
 Now that's how you deliver a
 perfect bayonet thrust boys!

Dan inhales and looks around to get his bearings and begins to bark more orders.

DAN:
 You and you, take charge of this
 fat bastard and the Major. I want
 'em gagged and cuffed. If they so
 much as whisper or fart, shoot 'em
 both dead. And you three go in
 there and make sure there's no one
 left hidin' inside. The rest of you
 get ready to move out through that
 trench.

Seconds later a single shot rings out from deep inside the pillbox. There is a pause and Private Halliday emerges grinning.

HALLIDAY:
 Hidin' under a bed!

Dan calls out while searching for his rifle.

DAN:
 All NCO's to me!

A young private runs up to hand Dan his rifle.

RIVERS:

Here you go Sarg! You left it by
the door.

Dan takes the weapon and stares at the young private. He bends down to pick up the pistol that had killed Corporal Thomas. He rolls the Lugar over twice then stuffs it into his belt. He turns to speak directly to the private.

DAN:

Rivers, you and Bennett get back up
to that gun. Smash the breach and
put two grenades down the barrel.

Private Rivers grins then tugs his pal by the sleeve.

RIVERS:

You betcha, Sargnmajr!

Rivers and Bennett race up to the gun emplacement and take turns smashing their rifle butts into the breach door tearing it from its hinge. Then they lash three grenades together and knot one end of a string to the pin of one grenade and roll them down into the barrel of the big gun. They then trail the chord back behind them to the edge of the door.

The two boys pause outside the door grinning at each other in anticipation. Rivers holds the line in his right hand and yells a signal he'd waited his whole young life to say.

RIVERS: (CONT'D)

FIRE IN THE HOLE. EVERYBODY HIT THE
DIRT!

The men all drop face down on the floor of the trench. Together Rivers and Bennett yank hard on the line but for a brief second nothing happens. A short blast then breaks the tension.

Just as the men begin to ease back up a second huge explosion erupts blowing the remainder of the roof sky-high and tossing shards of timber and concrete high into the morning sky. A great ball of fire lingers silently above them. The men begin to stand up, some still coughing, others wiping dust and dirt from their faces. Anticipating the worst Dan calls out.

DAN:

ANYBODY HURT?

No answer. A couple of waves indicating everyone was okay.

GERMAN CAPTAIN:

SCHEISE!

Dan turns to the two boys with fire in his eyes.

DAN:
That's just a fucking miracle!
You two dumb shits, did you bother
to see if it was loaded?

Bennett looks up sheepishly.

BENNETT:
Well, no Sargnmajr. You said to
blow it up, not disarm it.

Rivers nods his head in agreement.

Mitch doubles over laughing which triggers the rest of the men to start to roar out loud too. Recognizing the humour in the moment, Dan shakes his head and grins as he stares at the two boys.

DAN:
KEY-RISTE ALL FUCKIN' MIGHTY.

He checks his watch again, looks up and yells over his shoulder back into the trench

DAN: (CONT'D)
WE'RE STILL RUNNIN' LATE BOYS,
C'MON LET'S ROLL.

The men start the final push up to the top of the ridge in the same formation. Two others were left behind to tend to the wounded and guard prisoners.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM AT ALLIED SUPREME COMMAND HEADQUARTERS,
FRANCE - EASTER MORNING

A young intelligence Major races down a hallway and into the room unannounced, disturbing three general officers who are enjoying their morning tea. He is breathless as he speaks.

MAJOR SIMMONS:
They've done it! They've done it
sirs!

The Major's shouts echo across the marble floors of the chateau like a thunderbolt. Immediately the small group of command officers turns to Simmons, vexed at his untimely interruption of this senior staff meeting.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL GRAVES:
Oh for God's sake Simmons. Who's
done what?

SIMMONS:

Currie and the Canadians. They've taken Vimy Ridge, sir.

GRAVES:

Don't be daft Major, that's absolutely impossible!

Simmons hands the telegram to the closest senior officer in the group. Brigadier Almond reads it twice, blinks and responds in a mutter.

ALMOND:

Good God, sir, he's right. They have done it.

Almond slowly passes the message to Major General Sir Richard Bell who scans it and then springs to his feet.

BELL:

Good God Almighty! You must deliver this to Byng straight away Simmons!

EXT. VIMY RIDGE, THE SUMMIT - MORNING

Small groups of men are huddled together staring at the view of the Dovai Plain below. Others gather around low fires trying to boil water in the light rain.

Arriving from the rear, a staff sergeant and two men break the morning quiet racing up into the grove. A young corporal on sentry duty steps forward.

CORPORAL:

Halt! Who goes there?

SERGANT DICKENSON:

I'm Sergeant Dickenson on orders from Colonel Pierce. I'm looking for Warrant Officer Pulbrook.

CORPORAL:

If I was you I'd call him sargnmajr Sarg. That's him with the binoculars, standing up there with those other non-com's.

Dickenson offers a smart salute and rushes up toward the rocks. Staring through the glasses, Dan is passing observation notes to Mitch.

DAN:
There's another one about three
hundred yards to the left, another
88 I think..

His concentration is broken by a call from behind him.

DICKENSON:
I'm looking for Mister Pulbrook.

Dan lowers the binoculars and turns toward the sergeant while easing the Lugar from his belt. Noting the cold stares from the men on the hill, Dickenson presses on slowly.

DICKENSON: (CONT'D)
I hate to disturb you men but I
have new orders from headquarters.

There is a long uncomfortable groan as the men stare hard at him and then look away. More orders is not a message they want to hear. Dan continues to hold the Lugar as if he was preparing for target practice.

DAN:
And just who the hell are you?

DICKENSON:
I'm Dickinson, sir, Staff Sergeant
Dickinson. Colonel Pierce has sent
me up here to confirm your
situation.

He pulls out a folded sheet of paper from inside his tunic and thrusts it forward. Dan shoves the revolver back into his belt and takes the message.

DICKENSON: (CONT'D)
I need to report your condition
sir.

Dan stays fixed on the page as he responds.

DAN:
We've got just forty-six left
standin', six more wounded and
we're pretty much flat out of
ammunition and supplies. I've sent
a party back to collect our packs
to recover anything we can use.
(pauses)
We've been in contact with a Black
Watch unit about five hundred yards
to our left, near company strength,
maybe more.

(MORE)

DAN: (CONT'D)

I've sent two men to our right to search for the Princess Pats but we haven't heard anything yet.

DICKENSON:

They're out there, sir. A couple of companies strong. You'll probably see them within the hour.

Dan looks down and exhales slowly.

DAN:

Good, that's very good!

DICKENSON:

What shall I tell the colonel of your condition, sir?

DAN:

Tell him we're barely hanging on here. If the enemy mounts a counter-attack anytime soon, they'll run right through us like shit through a goose. Tell him that these men are spent.

DICKENSON:

Can you hold until relieved sir?

Dan shakes his head for a moment then continues.

DAN:

I've heard that line somewhere before somewhere Sergeant. Relieved? When?

DICKENSON:

The orders say about noon, sir.

Dan refolds the page and nods quietly.

DAN:

If they don't come in the next hour they won't likely be comin' today at all. We've seen occasional snipers but no sign of any advanced units yet and no artillery fire. My bet is that they will reform and come right back up that hill to hit us later tonight. So I guess we can hold on for a little while yet.

The sergeant salutes and chirps a happy response.

DICKENSON:

Very good. I'll tell the colonel
that straight away, sir.

Tired and aggravated Mitch barges into the conversation

MITCH:

You do that sonny and tell him
don't be late cause we ain't got a
friggin' chance if they do decide
to come back here anytime soon.

The staff sergeant hesitates a moment and tactfully retreats
as he looks directly back at Dan.

DICKENSON:

Yes sir, I'll make sure he knows.

MITCH:

And don't you ever call him sir!

Dan smiles and turns back to his binoculars.

EXT. PERIMETER OF THE RCR POSITION ON VIMY RIDGE - SAME DAY

The rain has finally stopped. At precisely thirty-six minutes
after twelve, a British reconnaissance party pokes their
heads through the trees. From behind an old wooden fence
Private Hicks lifts his weapon to his shoulder, aims but
calmly waits until the four men step within easy range.

HICKS:

Halt, who goes there?

The four intruders freeze and then one lifts his hand to his
mouth and calls out in an east London accent.

BRITISH SOLDIER:

Friend, we've come to relieve ye,
now lad.

A wide grin spreads across Hicks' face. He lowers his rifle
and calls back across the grove.

HICKS:

Advance friend and be recognized.

He turns back to his partner Private Sharpeson.

HICKS: (CONT'D)

Hey Red, go tell Pully the Brits
are finally here.

EXT. VIMY RIDGE - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

They uniforms are filthy, torn and blood stained. A few of the men have not yet washed the dried blood smears from their faces. The wounded are lying under a shady oak in a file of stretchers watched over by a single corporal.

The three German prisoners are cuffed and seated back to back in the center of the grove. The two older men whisper words of caution and comfort to the boy who is terrified and weeps openly. Mitch walks up beside them and snarls.

MITCH:

You stop that filthy chatter or
I'll break you up for kindling.

Standing directly over the young private, Mitch pauses and reaches down to turn the boy's terrified face up and calmly pushes his lit cigarette between the boy's lips. He then ambles back to join the other NCO's.

DAN:

Rest easy boys, we'll be leaving
here soon.

He waits until they are all seated then crouches down beside Mitch and lights up another cigarette.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Final count?

MITCH:

Nothin's changed, Pully. Forty-six
still standin', six wounded but two
of them won't last an hour.

Dan swallows hard and stares back down into the dirt.

DAN:

Good God, Mitch. Fifty-four dead.
They're gonna have us shot.

MITCH:

Oh no they won't. They'll just
stick another tin medal on ya then
kick your ass back out there for
more.

DAN:

Nope, I've had enough. I want no
more of this shit. No more.

Mitch resets his weapon to safety and lowers it to one side.

MITCH:

Nobody does, Pully. Nobody.

The men slowly rise up again as a cluster of English officers stride forward from behind the trees. Dan and Mitch are the last to their feet. A tall Major holding a worn swagger stick tucked under his left arm leads the way. They march up to a halt and salute.

MAJOR DINSMORE:

Major Dinsmore, East Kent Rifles.
It is a great pleasure to finally
catch up to you bunch, a great
pleasure indeed.

Dan recognizes the Major's voice immediately and for a split second he freezes in place. After a second he steps forward and stares the officer straight in the eye.

DAN:

Warrant Officer Pulbrook, sir.
Royal Canadian Regiment.

DINSMORE:

Yes, well I shall call you
lieutenant, after all only an
officer could have done what you've
accomplished here. Well done, young
man, very well done indeed.

The Major's grin expands with every word as he shakes Dan's hand a little too vigorously.

DINSMORE: (CONT'D)

I must say I feel very much like
Stanley finding Livingston in the
jungle.

Much to Dan's relief, a young captain intervenes before the Major can continue.

CAPTAIN ALBRIGHT:

Excuse me sir, I think we should
move the rest of the men up to
reinforce the line at the ridge. We
don't want Gerry to start up again
before we're ready.

DINSMORE:

Yes, yes, of course, Captain. Do
carry on.

DAN:

I have six wounded sir.

DISMORE:

Of course, Lieutenant.
And Captain, bring the medical unit
forward as quickly as possible.

DAN:

Much appreciated, sir.

The Major turns to watch as his NCO's blow their whistles and shout a litany of orders. Dinsmore casts his eyes around the glen searching.

DISMORE:

I am so looking forward to catching
the view from the top. Would you
care to show me that lieutenant?

Dan quickly agrees and then turns to wink at Mitch who grins.

DAN:

It'll be my pleasure, sir.
Sergeant, get the men ready to pull
out.

MITCH:

Oh, they're ready, sir. They're
more than ready!

Dan leads the Major down a narrow trail to a large boulder that sits at the ledge.

DAN:

Welcome to the Pimple, sir.

DINSMORE:

Pimple? Why on earth would you
people call it "the Pimple"?

DAN:

Hill 120 is barely a hundred and
twenty feet above sea level and its
the smallest of the three hills
along Vimy Ridge.

DINSMORE:

Oh yes, I see, of course.

DAN:

Just wait til you see the view
through the glasses sir, prettiest
sight on the ridge.

DINSMORE:

Jolly good! I am very much looking forward to it.

The small party continues down a newly stamped path toward the edge.

DINSMORE: (CONT'D)

You do know that we've spent two years and more than one hundred and fifty thousand men trying to take this position. Now you fellows come along and seize it in just thirty-six hours. Quite an amazing feat, you do realize?

Dan halts to allow the Major to catch up. He turns back to speak quietly in an emotionless tone.

DAN:

Yes sir, I do.

DISMORE:

What do you think could have made such a difference?

DAN:

Currie, sir.

DISMORE:

The spice from India?

DAN:

Ah, no sir, General Arthur Currie.

The Major glances down for a moment and raises his head abruptly.

DISMORE:

General Currie, eh? Never heard of him. He isn't by chance a Canadian officer?

Dan's proud response betrays his contempt.

DAN:

You bet he is sir, very Canadian!

Dinsmore throws his arms up and scoffs.

DISMORE:

Well no wonder we haven't heard of him, he's a bloody Canadian!

DAN:

Yes sir, we're all Canadians here.

The Major takes one step back and stares at the ground.

DISMORE:

When you think on it Pulbrook, it's most astonishing. A small command of four regiments of unheralded dominion troops under the command of some obscure provincial general seize a prize held by the best troops of the Imperial German Army! It's a major position that neither we, nor the French army could secure in more than two years of trying. Most astonishing indeed!

Dan can't resist smiling through his response.

DAN:

Maybe you should have asked us sooner, sir!
(smiles)
We should crawl forward from here, the Krauts already have snipers planted in the rocks below.

The Major crouches down behind Dan as they begin to snake forward to a cover-blind of stacked logs. The two men squeeze their way forward and lift their heads up barely above the barrier.

Below them stretches a wide plain of small farms clustered around two tiny villages. In the distance they can see a large town with three tall chimney towers that can be clearly identified as coal mines. Dinsmore takes the binoculars for a closer look.

DISMORE:

Oh, my God. This is an amazing view! No one at Command Headquarters ever thought we would see the Dovai Plain again before the end of the war. Marvelous, Lieutenant, simply marvelous.

BRITISH SERGANT:

Please sir, keep your voice down. Them snipers have already hit two of our lads in the last half hour.

The words had no sooner left his mouth than a single round ricochets off the top log tearing out splinters just above their heads. Dinsmore scurries to bury himself under the logs. Dan and the Sergeant quietly exchange a wide grin.

While Dinsmore is brushing the dirt from his tunic Dan leads them back to the grove. Mitch has the men ordered in a line of double file and is anxious to move out.

DISMORE:

It's queer you know lieutenant, but I could swear we've met before.

DAN:

Have you ever been to Canada, sir?

DISMORE:

No, Lieutenant, I've never had that privilege. Before the war I served most of my career in India. I'd venture a guess that you've never been to India have you lieutenant?

DAN:

No sir, I've never had that privilege.

DISMORE:

No, of course not Pulbrook. Still you do seem very familiar. Well, perhaps we can pick this up another time over a drink?

DAN:

I'd like that, sir but you're buyin'.

DISMORE:

My pleasure indeed.

Well then lieutenant, I can inform you that you are now formally relieved. Best of luck to you and again and well done young man.

DAN:

Thank-you very much, sir.

Dan turns to face Mitch.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Sergeant, let's move the men out now.

Mitch replies in a wide grin.

MITCH:
Yes sir, "lieutenant", sir.

Mitch salutes smartly and wheels around to face the men.

MITCH: (CONT'D)
COMPANY, ATTENSHUN.
BY THE LEFT, FORWARD MARCH.

Dan salutes the Major very precisely.

DAN:
With your permission, sir?

The Major grins and taps his cap with his stick.

DINSMORE:
Yes, of course, lieutenant, carry
on, do carry on.

Dan steps forward in time to lead the front of the line just as the men step briskly past a collection of English soldiers who are still emerging from the grove.

BRITISH CORPORAL:
Hey lads, 'ow about a big cheer for
them Canucks?

His men respond immediately, waving their caps and cheering "Hip, hip, hoorah!" in unison. Their voices ring across the glen and down the dusty road. The boys all lift their heads a little higher and push their shoulders back firmly. Without breaking stride Corporal Grimes speaks directly to the British soldiers.

GRIMES:
Don't let those filthy bastards
back up here! We don't wanna have
to come back here again!

MITCH:
If we ever hafta' come back here
I'm gonna personally kick everyone
of your lousy limey asses.

INT. CARGO HOLDING SHED, KITCHENER TRAIN STATION - DAY

Rose and Lucy stand huddled together stamping their feet on the freezing wooden floor.

Beside them lies a simple pine coffin on a large freight dolly, surrounded by other overloaded dollies heaped with bashed up wooden boxes and crushed canvass bags.

Rose fidgets with her old gloves while Lucy wraps and rewraps her scarf.

LUCY:
How much longer do you think?

ROSE:
No idea. They said fifteen minutes but it's already been half an hour.

LUCY:
Well I'm just very glad for what Doctor Morgan did for her. It could have been very messy all round.

ROSE:
I thought we agreed not to discuss it.

LUCY:
I'm just saying it was a wonderful thing for Lily and her family.

ROSE:
Yes it was a wonderful thing for him to do.

Lucy pauses and bows her head.

LUCY:
But I reckon that lying on a death certificate must be some kind of offense.

ROSE:
He did not lie, Lucy, now let's be very clear about that. She did die from pneumonia. There's no lie in that.

LUCY:
Well he certainly left out one important fact, didn't he? No mention of the baby, I reckon that could be criminal.

Rose steps abruptly forward and stares at Lucy.

ROSE:

Well Lucy, no one will ever have to find that out if you can just keep your mouth shut and your legal opinions to yourself.

Lucy bows her head to dodge Rose's glare.

LUCY:

I'm just saying that it could mean real trouble for us if someone did find out.

ROSE:

This is about protecting Lily and her family. She's going home to Kingston to rest in her family plot, just as it should be. No one needs to know any of the rest. It will only make it painful for her family and she'd end up in disgrace.

LUCY:

What about the baby? Her mother will want to know someday, won't she?

ROSE:

Only if you tell her! But for right now, lets give her poor mother some peace. They've had a very tough time since hearing of Bill's death too.

Lucy pauses and then nods in agreement.

A veteran baggage handler strolls out from behind a large swinging door and takes hold of the dolly respectfully.

BAGGAGE MAN:

Sorry, Ma'am but it's time to load.

ROSE:

Thank-you, just one moment, please?

Rose turns and steps up beside the casket and pats it softly as she whispers.

ROSE: (CONT'D)

You go ahead now Lily and don't you worry about a thing.

(MORE)

ROSE: (CONT'D)
We'll take good care of everything
for you here. Good-bye now, Luv,
God bless you and rest in peace.

Rose steps away and the old man begins to shove the cart gently forward toward the doors. The two women watch as it slowly disappears out toward the platform. Then they pause to hug one another for a moment and begin to make their way out the side door.

As they cross silently in front of the main office they are stopped by a loud tapping at one of the frosted windows. Rose stares inside the tiny telegraph office where a woman is waving at her to come inside.

LUCY:
What the heck can this be about?

Rose pushes through the old wooden door. She glances up and recognizes Mavis Knowles from church. Her husband had been the telegraph operator until early in the war when his skills had been recruited for the army. Rose steps into the tiny office and removes her gloves.

ROSE:
Hello Mavis, my it's lovely and
warm in here. You remember my
friend Lucy Wright?

Mavis nods quietly to Lucy and speaks hesitantly.

MAVIS:
I'm very sorry to pull you away
like that Rose. My daughter Jenny
had been over to your place earlier
but you weren't home.

Rose freezes, her face falls and her mouth goes dry. Mavis lowers her eyes and speaks softly.

MAVIS: (CONT'D)
There's a telegram for you Rose.

LUCY:
Oh, my God, No. Not now!

Mavis steps over to a large wooden rack that holds the undelivered messages. She pulls out a single white sealed envelope and passes it to Rose.

MAVIS:
It's from New York.

LUCY:
New York? Maybe it's good news for
a change.

Lucy's smile is instantly doused when she catches the sorrow in Mavis' eyes. Rose opens the envelope slowly and scans the message.

To: Mrs. Rose Pulbrook. This message has been translated to English and forwarded to you by the Consulate of the Republic of France, New York City, USA.

'Chere Madame,

The President of the Republique of France most humbly regrets to inform you of the death of Lieutenant John Allen Charlton who was killed in action over Arras on the twenty-third of March last. He died a hero of France fighting for liberty and democracy. He was beloved by his comrades who will never forget him for his humour and humanity. Lieutenant Charlton has been posthumously awarded the Croix de Guerre for his gallantry under fire.

With great respect, Georges de LaTurne, Colonel, Officer Commanding, La Lafayette Escadrille

Rose bows her head and pulls the telegram flush against her breast and then drops it on the counter. She raises both hands to her face and begins to weep openly.

ROSE:
Oh, Jake!

Lucy takes the message and reads it quietly. Mavis comes around the counter and pulls Rose close in her arms in a warm embrace from someone who knows and understands her pain. Lucy waits a few moments to let her sobbing subside.

LUCY:
Who on earth was John Allen
Charlton?

Rose looks up slowly and stares fiercely at Lucy. With a flood of tears rolling down her cheeks she pushes one step back from Mavis and lifts her head.

ROSE:
He was Danny's best friend and a
very dear friend of mine!

Lucy hangs her head and whispers.

LUCY:

Oh, I see.

EXT. CALAIS, A SMALL CANADIAN ENCAMPMENT - DAY (MID-FEBRUARY 1919)

Dan stands beside a stack of wooden crates filled with new uniforms while watching the lines of men come and go through various supply tents. He notices that the stenciling on the box beside him reads Hespler Ontario.

DAN:

(shaking his head)

That's the army for ya. They arrive just as we're gettin' ready to leave.

The men sit ringed around their NCO's and try to push back the boredom by exchanging old jokes and salacious stories.

SOLDIER:

"And then she says I can keep it!"

His four platoon mates roar with laughter.

Across the compound a company of engineers is stretched out lazily playing poker on a couple of torn blankets, one of them quietly strums a battered old guitar. A Sergeant-Major stops in front of them to make an announcement.

SERGEANT-MAJOR WILLIAMS:

All right you filthy bunch. You're next for the showers.

PRIVATE REEVES:

Shower, what the hell is that Sarg?

On William's order, the men strip down and toss their filthy rags to a burn pile and then shuffle off to the shower tent.

The men of Dan's company readily offer their comments.

CORPORAL GRAVES:

Well, well! No one told us the Follies were in town.

SARGEANT DAVIS:

(laughing)

They're all so stunning! It's hard to pick a favorite!

Once out of the showers, the men are directed to a long table to collect new uniforms.

Underwear and socks are soon stacked on top of an armful of trousers, shirts, tunics, caps and boots. Two soldiers wrestle with their new gear.

BERT:

Good God, Harry. These lovely new duds must be meant for the Yanks. They're always ready for another parade.

HARRY:

No doubt Bert, for those boys from that famous "Rainbow Battalion".

BERT:

Yep, first to show up right after the storm's passed.

HARRY:

Everything is so damned tight. I wish I could get my old one back.

Outside Colonel Pierce is passing through the area and stops when he reaches Dan.

PIERCE:

That was a hell of a thing you guys delivered in Mons, Pully, a great way for us to end it all.

(lowers his head)

I was very sorry to hear about Mitch. Really tough to take just two days before the armistice.

Dan shakes his head and speaks in a near whisper.

DAN:

He was covering a couple of guys trying to take out a machine gun when a sniper got him. Brutal timing for his wife!

PIERCE:

Absolutely brutal! He was a great soldier.

DAN:

Yep, the best I knew for sure.

PIERCE:

You two guys were together from the beginning I think.

DAN:
Yeah, since day one of basic.

PIERCE:
That's really tough.

DAN:
(looks down and whispers)
I'm not sure I'll ever get over it.

PIERCE:
(tries to lift the mood)
Well, they're planning a special parade tomorrow. General Andrews wants to make sure your unit gets a special citation, the "Mons Star" he called it.

DAN:
Thanks Colonel, but all any us want to do now is to get the hell out of here and home.

PIERCE:
Enough said. I'll tell him that he should just mail it to you guys. It will look great beside that King George Cross from Vimy. You've had a hell of a war Mr. Pulbrook.

DAN:
I honestly don't give a damn about any medals. I'm just relieved it's finally done so we can all go home.

PIERCE:
On a happier note the general staff has ruled out the need for us to return to Britain before we go back to Canada. Apparently no one in England wants to see any more of "those ruffians from Canada".

DAN:
(smiles)
Well they finally got something right! I tell you this sir, these guys are going to explode at the first sight of home.

Colonel Pierce shakes Danny's hand.

PIERCE:

Thanks for everything Pulbrook, I'd promote you again but I know how much you'd hate that.

DAN:

You got that right sir, but thanks anyway.

Dan walks toward the far end of the camp to a small communications tent at that has been set up for the departing troops. A staff sergeant from the Signals Corps steps outside to deliver a simple direct order to the line of men assembled in front of him.

STAFF SEARGANT ARNOLD:

Listen up now. Lucky for you we've already written the first part of your fifty word message. It will say; "I will embark from France on the twenty-fifth of February and will arrive in Montreal on the twelfth of March. I then travel by train to Toronto to make my way home from there."

That's thirty-four of your fifty words already gone, leaving you just a precious sixteen more words. So keep your 'lovev dovie' personal notes to an absolute minimum. "Love Frank" is plenty good enough.

(pauses to take a breath)

You must print your message in plain legible English and make certain you double check the address of the receiver. If you've forgotten how to spell your name, then move to the table on the left and the corporal will help you out.

Dan steps up to the second table and draws each block letter carefully.

To: Mrs. D. Pulbrook, 18 Eagle Lane, Hespler, Ontario. I am safe and unhurt. Please meet me in Toronto, will confirm from Montreal. Love Dan. (Sixteen words exactly)

Dan makes his way back through the line to a small packing case and beside a large freight wagon. He sets it up lengthwise, eases himself down on its end and lights a cigarette. After a long pause, he searches inside his left tunic pocket to retrieve the crumpled blue envelope.

Dan unfolds the faded pages and reads again the words that have carried him through every day of the war since it arrived. He chokes at the thought of letting her go. He knows every line by heart but it's the closing that always brings him the greatest pain.

"Dream great dreams of Rhodesia, Darling"; six words that wound him deeply every time. He pauses and pushes back a tear and then hangs his head as he inches the rumpled pages upward until they touch the tip of his cigarette.

DAN:

Rhodesia.

EXT. UNION STATION TORONTO - DAY (MARCH 1919)

Sitting on a bench along the platform, Rose is lost in thought but pauses to listen to a distant whistle. She jostles in her seat as she tries to comfort the baby tucked in her arms.

ROSE:

There, there now sweetheart. It won't be long now.

People begin to rush out from the waiting room to assemble along the platform. Clusters of women and anxious children smile nervously. The men are the last to join them as they try to maintain an air of propriety.

GENTELMAN:

For goodness sakes Alice, pull these children together!

HIS WIFE:

Oh Randall, go suck an egg!
Lawrence is on that train and we are going to relish every second of his return with or without your approval.

The man is taken aback by her rebuke as the whistle becomes a long blast that erupts throughout the station.

Rose remains seated on the bench as the engine shuffles past her and the ten carriages come to a grinding halt.

As the soldiers begin to disembark, there are screams of delight and wild euphoric embraces. Some of the young wives and sweethearts are kissed publicly with more passion than they'd ever known behind closed doors.

Some parents are so overwhelmed they cannot speak while others fill their joyous moments with torrents of babble.

Suddenly a roaring wave of brown khaki erupts from the rear of the train. A gang of drunken hooligans overwhelm the small crowd as they charge down the narrow platform. Their numbers include several NCO's and even a few officers. It's clear they won't tolerate any delays as they race to the exits and out to the city. A few older women and young children are knocked to the ground as they try to escape their path. An angry police sergeant reaches out to snare a drunken corporal by the collar and throws him up against the side of a carriage.

POLICE SEARGANT:

What the hell goes on here? You'd better get hold of these men fast or you will have a full fledged riot to answer for.

CORPORAL:

Get your hooks off me, you contemptible old bastard or I'll toss you right into that gang of wolves. These guys have been locked up tighter 'an aunt Bridie's corset since the day we left France and there's no holding us back now!

Pushes hard into the sergeant's face.

CORPORAL: (CONT'D)

We ain't seen nothin' but blood, and ruin for four long years of fightin' for this damn country and we're sure as hell are gonna make up for some of it now! Now get the fuck out of my way!

The corporal shoves the policeman's arm aside to continue his staggering march down the platform weaving his way past a bruised civilians and wailing children.

Dan is among the last to disembark. He steps down slowly from the second to last carriage and walks forward taking in all the devastation. He stops to reach under one of the cars to help drag one bloodied policeman back up on the platform and then holds him steady until his mates can collect him.

DAN:

Easy there granddad, you'll be fine in a few minutes.

An older Englishman dressed in an elegant gray suit steps forward and glares angrily and raises his walking-stick to Dan.

ENGLISHMAN:

See hear, Sergeant-Major, how in God's name can you allow this to happen? If I hadn't witnessed it myself I would never believe that His Majesty's troops could ever behave in such a filthy manner. They tore through this station like the Huns through Belgium. I hope they catch every damn one and throw them all in prison, you most of all!

(points his stick at Dan)

This bloody upstart Canadian army. There is not one iota of discipline in the whole damn outfit. You're all a bloody disgrace!

DAN:

(roars back defiantly.)

Just a damned minute you self-righteous limey son-of-a bitch. You never saw what those Huns did in Belgium or you'd never speak to me or any other Canadian soldier like that. Ever!

Dan steps forward, grabs the man's stick and tosses it far across the tracks.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Now listen to me asshole! Our guys did see everything those German bastards did to those poor people in Belgium, in Mons to be exact. Horrible things that you couldn't possibly bear to know about. So I'm tellin' you and every other contemptible British S.O.B. who stayed home tucked safely in your beds, that this little event was a church parade in comparison to anything in Belgium.

Danny shoves the older man aside and steps defiantly in front of him.

As he continues down the platform he pauses to witness the delighted faces of the soldiers he passes, each with an arm wrapped around the waist of at least one woman, a wife, a sweetheart, a mother, or both. A blast from the engine engulfs him in a curtain of steam. From somewhere beyond a conductor's voice echoes through the last of the fading mist.

CONDUCTOR:

Train 58: Now boarding for
Hamilton, Kitchener, and London!
Departing in five minutes.

As the steam retreats, a new group of travelers, most of them civilians push past him toward the train. Gazing through the steam he spots a woman seated on a bench clutching a baby. As he steps closer, the baby begins to wail and the woman tries to wrestle it tighter into her arms. Dan sits down slowly beside her and she turns to face him. He is stunned to recognize her face.

DAN:

Rose?

He slides cautiously up next to her.

DAN: (CONT'D)

Oh, my God. Rose!

As he speaks the child's wailing turns to a calm gurgle. Rose looks at him in a vacant stare. A second blast of the train's whistle reverberates across the platform.

Rose blinks twice then whispers.

ROSE:

Welcome home, Danny. Sorry I'm such
a sight.

Dan wraps his left arm slowly around her shoulder. Rose wavers momentarily and lifts the baby up closer to his face.

DAN:

Well, well and just who do we have
here?

Rose turns her face to look directly into Dan's eyes. She speaks to him slowly and calmly.

ROSE:

Her name is Lily, after both her
own sweet mother and mine. Her
mother was my very good friend and
on the day she died I promised that
she would stay with me forever.

Danny looks into Rose's eyes and nods in acceptance.

CONDUCTOR:
Final call for train 58 for
Hamilton, Kitchener and London.
All aboard!

Dan lifts his battered pocket watch out of his breast pocket.

DAN:
That train 58 is right on time.

Rose nods an acknowledgement as he returns it to his pocket.

He reaches across and slowly lifts the baby up from her arms.

DAN: (CONT'D)
Hello Miss Lily. I am very happy to
know you. I can see we're going to
be great friends.

ROSE:
She doesn't have a christening name
yet. I just haven't been able to
bring myself to even consider it.

DAN:
(kisses the child's cheek)
Grace, her name is Lillian Grace.

Rose stares into his eyes and smiles for the first time.

ROSE:
Grace, that's a lovely name.

Rose hesitates as her face drops slightly.

ROSE: (CONT'D)
Was she someone you knew?

Dan looks directly back into her eyes again and nods.

DAN:
Yes Rose, she was someone I knew.

Rose pauses then nods again in quiet acceptance.

Clutching the child to his shoulder Danny reaches back to
ease Rose up to her feet to hurry them down the platform.

DAN: (CONT'D)
Come along then, Miss Pulbrook.
We're all headin' home now and this
train won't wait.

The final whistle screams as the train begins to lurch forward. Dan lifts them up to the stairwell of the last carriage where they stand facing each other. Danny slowly pulls Rose close to him again and speaks calmly into her ear.

DAN: (CONT'D)

It's all over now, Rose. It's all behind us, done and gone, forever! We're all we've got now, just the three of us. So we'll take all the little bits of whatever's left over and make a new go of it together from here on.

Rose pauses for a moment as the train begins to gather speed. She hugs him closer and bends down to kiss the baby's cheek.