

AFTER YOU'VE GONE

Written by

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EXT. GREENOCK, SCOTLAND - EVENING

We follow a young man, HENRY STEWART (25) as he walks home through a small town. The sweat on his back shows he's worked a full day. Old brick homes line the cobblestone streets, horse drawn carriages and riders on horseback make up the background noise. People smile to him when he crosses their path, he's well known and friendly. He raises his cap to women in a show of respect. They smile fondly at him, he must be attractive.

He walks to the edge of town and stops at a small, one-story wooden home. Even though it is imperfect, it's still beautiful with kept up flowers and a garden outside.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Henry enters the home and places his cap on a small wooden table, it's covered in a lace tablecloth. Some lace is missing, it's old but loved.

HENRY

Ruthie?

Henry continues through the house, he turns a corner to find his fiancé.

INT. KITCHEN IN GREENOCK, SCOTLAND - EVENING

RUTH THOMPSON (23) stands stirring a pot of dark liquid and random chunks of meat. She wears a simple gold band on her left ring finger, nothing too extravagant, just enough to show she's engaged.

Henry enters the room. Ruth doesn't look up from the pot.

RUTH

(not looking up)

You're late. Again.

HENRY

I got held up at work. My shift ran over.

RUTH

Your shift always runs over.

HENRY

(smiling)

Then you shouldn't be surprised I'm late!

Ruth turns to face Henry.

RUTH
(matching Henry's smile)
Never surprised! Just disappointed.
(serious)
How was it down there?

Henry sighs and takes a seat at the table. Ruth pours the stew into two bowls and sits opposite him.

HENRY
Not great... The majority of the guys have been shipped out so James and I are essentially running the place now.

RUTH
And how is that going?

HENRY
Not too bad...

Henry plays with his spoon in his soup.

HENRY (CONT'D)
More lonely than anything...

Ruth places her hand on Henry's.

RUTH
Lonely but safe.

Henry fails to meet her eyes.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I take it James finally gave up on his silly idea of joining the war?

Henry doesn't respond.

RUTH
Tell me he didn't.

Henry still doesn't meet her eyes. She doesn't need him to confirm her worst suspicions.

RUTH
Tell me you didn't, Henry.

HENRY
Ya ken it won't even last a year, what's wrong with it?

Ruth eyes Henry as she dips her spoon into her bowl. She takes a long sip from it.

RUTH

I could **kill** James for this.

(a beat)

Is this about my parents? Is that why you're so adamant to go and return a different man?

Henry rolls his eyes.

HENRY

Well if I had a couple of medals on my chest I'm sure they'd actually attend our wedding now.

RUTH

Then what am I supposed to do while you're gone? Take your job at the shipyard?

(laughs)

Oh I'm sure my Pa would love that! You're absolutely right, he'd **definitely** attend the wedding now!

Henry looks at the wall. He sees a framed black and white photo of his family.

ANGLE ON: black and white photo of family on farm. A young Henry smiles widely next to three sisters and a set of parents. The father looks stern but kind.

HENRY

It's my duty...

Ruth sighs. She too looks at the photograph now.

RUTH

Your father has nothing to do with this Henry.

A beat.

RUTH

This is all because of James. It's his idea to join the war and you've always followed him into battle figuratively... except now he's finally got you to do it literally.

Henry takes a deep breath. He looks at Ruth and grabs her hand.

HENRY

I haven't enlisted, not yet at least. And neither has James. It's just something we've been thinking about.

Ruth takes a deep breath. She's quieter now. She squeezes Henry's hand then lets go of it.

RUTH

(composes herself)
Good. You still have time to not make a mistake.

She drops Henry's hand.

RUTH

Well, let's eat then. No need to waste a perfectly good meal!

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Henry stands washing dishes. A song starts playing from the living room.

SFX: I LOVE YOU TRULY (1912)

Henry drops his rag and follows the sound.

Ruth is standing in the living room, she's watching the phonograph as the record spins. Above the record is a framed medal.

Henry approaches her from behind and hugs her.

HENRY

(soft)
I know.

RUTH

You don't.

Ruth turns to face him, tears in her eyes.

RUTH

I never met him but...

Henry wipes her tears.

HENRY

He would have loved you.

RUTH
Is this really what you need to do?

Henry looks at the medal. It's a Victoria Cross medal awarded posthumously for gallantry in the face of the enemy. He looks to Ruth.

HENRY
May I have this dance?

Ruth silently nods.

The couple slowly dances.

RUTH
(in tears again)
I'm going to miss you, Henry.

HENRY
Ruth-

RUTH
I never met your father, nor your
mother seeing as his death killed
her.
(pause)
But if this is what you want... I
refuse to stand in your way.

Henry pulls her close and dips her. The couple continues to dance.

The camera pans from Henry and Ruth into a hallway, as it moves down the hallway it pans into another room with another couple. We're no longer in Scotland.

INT. KITCHEN IN DRESDEN, GERMANY - EVENING

HELENE WAGNER (30) sits opposite of her husband, FRANZ WAGNER (35) at dinner. They eat with the same song playing as before. Helene speaks.

HELENE
(sarcastic)
How many days do we have left
before you abandon us?

FRANZ
(frustrated)
Helene, I am not abandoning you.

HELENE

Oh? Is that not the definition of leaving one's family behind? Are you not leaving Johanna and I?

FRANZ

You should be proud! Your husband: a soldier! That's exciting.

Helene rolls her eyes as she takes a bite of food.

FRANZ

You act as if I have a choice in the matter.

HELENE

You always have a choice.

FRANZ

Not when your country has gone to war.

Helene and Franz go silent as they struggle to continue their meal. They glance up and meet sad eyes. The sound of utensils fill the room.

FRANZ

If not me, then who?

HELENE

I don't understand.

FRANZ

If you could choose another man to send in my place, who would it be?

HELENE

Franz, I don't have the time or patience for a lecture of ethics.

A baby's cry is heard throughout the house. Helene stands up.

She goes to leave but stops in the doorway.

HELENE

All I know is that leaving me to become a widow and Johanna to become fatherless, is the least ethical thing you could do.

Helene leaves. Franz stares at his food, he has no remark to make in return.

INT. NURSERY ROOM, GERMANY - EVENING

Helene bounces a baby JOHANNA (1) on her hip. Franz enters the room and faces her back.

FRANZ

Helene...

Helene does not respond.

FRANZ

I am the ideal man to go to war, do you know why?

Helene faces Franz

FRANZ

It is because I have the most important reason to come home.

Franz pulls Helene into his arms.

HELENE

And you promise?

Franz tilts his head in a questioning manner.

HELENE

To come home.

Franz pulls both Helene and Johanna into his arms. He kisses Helene on the forehead.

FRANZ

As if I could stay away?

SFX: I LOVE YOU TRULY (1912)

The song continues to play from the phonograph downstairs as the couple stands motionless in the nursery.

HELENE

Your students will miss you.

FRANZ

As much as you will?

Helene laughs.

HELENE

I wouldn't be surprised.

FRANZ

They'll be elated to know they have
a break from their grammar studies.

Johanna giggles.

FRANZ

Even little Jo agrees!

Helene rolls her eyes.

HELENE

We agreed on calling her Johanna...
She's not a boy!

EXT. RIVER CLYDE SHIPYARD - MORNING

Henry stands on the riverbank skipping rocks. There are scattered and few workers around him, the majority of men have enlisted. It's their lunch break and the other men are playing soccer in the back.

JAMES (O.C.)

(kicks a ball to Henry)
Ruthie didn't pack a meal for you
today?

Henry feels the ball hit the back of his leg. He drops a rock and turns to find his best friend, JAMES ANDERSON (24) approaching him with an envelope in his left hand, sandwich in his right.

HENRY

She's not exactly taking your next
bright idea so well.

JAMES

(takes a bite)
Rest assured that will be no
longer.

HENRY

You're no longer enlisting?

Henry kicks the ball back to James.

James stops the ball with a wide smile.

JAMES

Oh no, I definitely did.

James holds up the envelope. It's his enlistment papers.

JAMES

It's just no longer an idea, now
it's been put to action!

James playfully punches Henry on the shoulder. He offers his sandwich to Henry who takes it with a smile.

JAMES

(reading)

The 2nd Battalion of the Royal
Welsh Fusiliers. Tell me it doesn't
have a nice ring to it.

HENRY

(laughing, takes a bite)

You're an idiot.

JAMES

How can you say that? You should
watch your tongue given we'll be
living in trenches together for the
next 6 months.

(a beat)

Maybe I'll use you as bait to lure
out the evil Germans!

James grabs the sandwich back and finishes it.

HENRY

Maybe Ruth was right, maybe you are
a bad influence.

JAMES

(mouth full)

You should have done my plan.

(swallows)

Left and sent her a postcard from
Germany.

HENRY

(laughs)

And here I am wondering why you're
still single?

JAMES

It's because they're too damn
difficult.

HENRY

Oh sure... *that's* why.

JAMES

I've been with almost every
available woman here in Greenock.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

(pauses)

And of course there was that biter
in Kilmacolm.

Henry grabs the papers from James.

HENRY

So this is really happening?

JAMES

It's as real as rain, my friend.

HENRY

Do you think we'll live to regret
it?

JAMES

What's a life without a little
regret?

James takes the papers back and hits Henry over the head with
them.

JAMES

But this my friend! This is us
making a name for ourselves and
getting out of this hell.

HENRY

Hell? You know they say that war is
the real hell.

JAMES

Only for the losers! We're going to
have the time of our lives.

James kicks the ball back to Henry.

HENRY

How do we know we'll even be in the
same troop?

JAMES

(grinning madly)

I know a guy...

INT. FRANZ'S HOUSE: NURSERY

Franz bounces a baby Jo on his knee while singing. Helene
enters the room.

HELENE

She'll miss you...

She leans against the door.

HELENE
Maybe even more than me.

FRANZ
That's impossible.

He stands, holding Jo, he kisses Helene on the cheek.

FRANZ
It's unbelievable.

Helene raises an eyebrow questioning what he's implying.

FRANZ
We almost have a one year old!

Helene kisses the head of her child.

HELENE
(sadly)
You'll miss her birthday, her first
Christmas...

FRANZ
I promise you I won't miss her
first Christmas.

EXT. BOOTCAMP, ENGLAND - MORNING

James and Henry stand alert in a long line of men as a
General yells at them.

HENRY
(whispering)
So this was the guy?

JAMES
You know what, I'm gonna stab you
with my bayonet for that comment.

A beat.

JAMES
He was aunt's fiancée before she...
well you know.

HENRY
Before she ran away to Canada?

JAMES
It's a touchy subject for him.

GENERAL EVERTON (52) turns sharply.

EVERTON
Private Anderson, did I just hear
you speak out of turn?

JAMES
No sir!

EVERTON
Congratulations Private, you're on
latrine duty.

INT. LATRINES - LATER

ANGLE ON: James cleaning out the latrines as Henry stands
post beside him.

JAMES
Well isn't this a load of shite?

EXT. BOOTCAMP, GERMANY - MORNING

Franz, now dressed in military attire, walks throughout camp
with some soldiers. GENERAL FISCHER (40) greets him.

FISCHER
Private Wagner, welcome to the
134th Saxon Infantry!

FRANZ
Well aren't you a sight for sore
eyes!

FISCHER
It only took a war to bring us
together again!

FRANZ
(laughing)
Does my wife's birthday two months
ago not count?

FISCHER
We'll have to see with how you fall
in line.

FRANZ
I hope you haven't told my
commanding officers to go easy on
me... given that I'm an old friend?

FISCHER
(slaps Franz on the back)
Just the opposite.

FRANZ
(laughs, then serious)
But man to man... Hans, what's your
take on all this?

Fischer stops walking and throws an arm over Franz's
shoulder.

FISCHER
That you should write Helene
immediately and tell her there's no
doubt you'll be home for Christmas!

FRANZ
She'll be elated to hear that. As
am I.

FISCHER
Anything to calm her nerves.

Fischer and Franz continue walking.

FISCHER
By the way, it's General Fischer
now.

FRANZ
(laughs)
I'm sorry?

FISCHER
(laughing)
You have to call me General Fischer
from now on.

Franz playfully shoves Fischer away from him. He playfully
laughs, a sound that is rare coming from someone who knows
more than he's letting on. There's already been too much
bloodshed for a war meant to last only a year.

FISCHER
I'm surprised she didn't break one
of your limbs so you couldn't
leave.

Franz laughs.

FRANZ

I'm sure she tried, I just happened to move a little when she attempted it while I slept.

FLASHBACK:

Franz and Helene are in the same hugging pose as we last left them.

FRANZ

Do you feel any better?

Helene starts muttering in German and leaves the room.

FRANZ

Der liebbling?

Franz follows her down the hallways. She tears a framed wedding photo off the wall.

FRANZ

HELENE!

Helene blows the dust off. It's apparent they've been together a while.

HELENE

Here. Your tent will need it more.

FRANZ

I don't-

Helene softly smiles. She looks at the new hole in the wall from where the nail hung.

HELENE

We'll just have to take a new photo when you get back.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. BOOTCAMP, ENGLAND - NIGHT

Identical white tents line the grounds as men sit outside eating what they've been told is edible food. There are sounds of laughter and singing. These men have not yet experienced the horror of war and still retain a naive innocence.

James and Henry sit outside one of these white tents eating. The men around them talk but there is comfort in the silence between them.

JAMES
Have I told you of my bunkmate?

HENRY
Can't be as bad as mine.

Henry places an almost empty, metal plate on the dirt ground. Small morsels of leftover meat and bread remain. It's the best they can have considering the circumstances.

HENRY
You should hear the comments mine makes about Ruth!

JAMES
(shakes head and laughs)
I told you not to bring that photo.

HENRY
It's her on holiday, James!

JAMES
Holiday at the beach though, no?

HENRY
These men are-

Henry looks around.

HENRY
(whispers)
Animals.

JAMES
(joking)
Alright, I've had enough of you.
(pauses)
Let's talk about me for a second.

James places his plate next to Henry. He's barely touched his food.

HENRY
What? You didn't like it?

JAMES
Ruth has got to be the worst cook in the world for you to be able to stomach this shite.

Henry rolls his eyes. He grabs James's plate and eats the leftover food.

HENRY

It's been almost a month and I want
nothing more than her meat pie.

James raises his eyebrows.

HENRY

Don't be a nasty man James!

James raises his hands up in defense.

JAMES

Yer the man who put that image in
my head.

James bangs a piece of hard bread against a piece of wood, it
makes a resonant sound.

JAMES

Awful.

(pause)

But that's what you want more than
anything?

HENRY

Of course.

JAMES

That's what you wish for at night?

HENRY

Don't be an arse!

A beat. Henry takes the bread back from James and dips it in
some mysterious grey liquid on a plate. James gags.

A beat.

JAMES

He's from Earlston. A bairn.

HENRY

Your bunkmate?

Henry continues eating.

JAMES

Who else?

HENRY

(bread in mouth)

That's farmland.

JAMES

It's all he talks about! I know more about chicken mating than I ever needed to know.

Henry points his fork at James.

HENRY

Maybe you can actually learn something for once.

JAMES

Believe me! I know *enough* about mating. But with actual cocks... not the animal kind!

Henry laughs and rolls his eyes.

JAMES

He's a wee bairn, Henry! There's nothing he can teach me.

HENRY

(rolls eyes)
We're all bairns, James.

JAMES

No, I'm talking real young. Lied on the enlistment form young.

HENRY

(pauses)
Shit.

JAMES

He's a Scot though, so he'll be fine.

HENRY

Then what's the problem?

JAMES

I'm not ready for fatherhood!

Henry laughs. James always had a tendency to avoid younger boys since he can't handle the responsibility of "role model."

Before Henry can respond, a young boy, JOSEPH "JOE" SCOTT finds them.

JOE

Mr. Anderson-

JAMES
(interrupting)
James.

JOE
James, I'm gonna head to bed but I
wanted ta check with ya before I
blew out the candle.

JAMES
You don't have to-

Henry laughs and extends a hand towards Joe.

HENRY
So you're the bunkmate!

JOE
Yes sir!
(salutes)
Joseph Scott.

HENRY
I'm not your superior, no need for
the at ease.

JOE
Of course, Sir.

HENRY
No need for that either. Earlston,
right? That's a lot of empty land
out there.

JOE
I'm a- well I was a farmer.

HENRY
My father was a farmer too.

James rolls his eyes. If Henry starts talking about his
father, he'll never stop.

JOE
What kind?

HENRY
Dairy. We had too many cows than we
knew what to do with.

JOE
And the cows now?

HENRY
(pauses)
Uh, sold.

JOE
Oh.

HENRY
(pauses)
Yeah they went with the farm when
he- well when *I* moved to Greenock.

JAMES
(sighs)
It's a long story, Joe.

Joe looks around the camp, the men are ending their conversations and heading to bed. He sits cross-legged on the ground between James and Henry. There's a boyish smile on his face.

JOE
(shrugs)
I've got nowhere to be.

HENRY
I like you Joseph.

JOE
Friends and family call me Joe.

JAMES
(laughs)
So we're friends now?

JOE
We're going to war together.
(pauses)
That makes us closer than family.

INT. BOOTCAMP TENT, GERMANY - NIGHT

Franz takes off his boots. He readies himself for bed. His bunkmate, NICHOLAS ZIMMERMANN (45), enters. He's obviously older than Franz as seen by the few strands of gray hair spilling out from his hat. He's experienced with fighting but hesitant to show it.

Behind him is a 50 pound dog VERA (4). She looks like a mutt with her dark markings and one ear cocked higher than the other. Her only job is to carry medical supplies and seeing as how Nicholas is the surgeon in charge, they've become fast friends.

NICHOLAS
Tough day, huh?

Nicholas takes his boots off and Vera trots over to greet Franz.

FRANZ
Mhm? Oh yes, tough day indeed.

Franz gives Vera a pat on the head.

FRANZ
Tough day for you too?

NICHOLAS
Me or the dog?

FRANZ
(laughs)
I suppose the both of you.

Nicholas joins Franz in petting Vera.

NICHOLAS
She's a good girl. She's had an excellent day. Even got a fair share of some meat. Now me... I've seen my fair share of bones and gore today.

Vera returns to Nicholas and lays at the end of his bed.

NICHOLAS
I take it you know Fischer?

Nicholas sits on his cot.

FRANZ
(laughs)
Is it that obvious?

NICHOLAS
(smiling)
Well, you're our newest addition and have yet to be put on shit duty.

FRANZ
My cousin's husband. Ending up assigned with him was pure luck though.

NICHOLAS

That'll do it! However, maybe I'll
put you on gauze duty in my
surgery.

Nicholas laughs to himself. Franz smiles sliding into bed, he
plays with his wedding band on top of the blanket.

INT. FRANZ'S HOUSE

Helene stands in her kitchen, surrounded by family and
friends. Jo sits in her wooden highchair. A middle-aged man,
OTTO MEYER walks in holding a cake.

OTTO

Still not sure why such a tiny
thing needs such a big cake!

Helene laughs.

HELENE

Only the best for my one-year-old!

She nuzzles her baby's face, kissing her all over.

BIRTHDAY GUEST #1

(laughing)

I take it there will be enough cake
for everyone?

BIRTHDAY GUEST #2

Perhaps we send a slice to Franz if
it is still good?

OTTO

You know my brother-in-law, he'll
eat anything!

INT. BOOTCAMP TENT, GERMANY - NIGHT

Nicholas sits on his cot, rubbing Vera. Franz continues to
play with his wedding ring.

NICHOLAS

What's her name?

FRANZ

Helene.

NICHOLAS

How long?

FRANZ

Ten years.

NICHOLAS

Congratulations.

Franz sits up in bed.

FRANZ

Thank you.

Franz opens his mouth to continue talking. He changes his mind and continues to fiddle with his ring.

NICHOLAS

(chuckles)

Anything you wanna add, Wagner?

FRANZ

We just had a daughter.

(pauses)

Only took seven years.

NICHOLAS

For a daughter or child?

FRANZ

A child... she actually turned one today.

Nicholas nods, he smiles fondly.

NICHOLAS

Congratulations. I remember that first year, scariest time of my life.

FRANZ

I feel guilty she's doing it all by herself.

INT. FRANZ'S HOUSE

Ruth lights the candles on Jo's cake. A record player plays in the back an upbeat tune.

RUTH

Two candles. One symbolizing now and the other your future.

Jo has no idea what is going on but is just happy to be included.

RUTH

Otto-

Ruth's brother joins her behind Jo, they blow out the candles together. Jo claps when everyone else does. A voiceover of Nicholas and Franz begins, it's the only thing we hear.

FRANZ (V.O.)

What was it like? That first year?

NICHOLAS (V.O.)

Hard... So very hard. But so worth it.

Ruth is seen cutting the cake for Jo, smiling.

NICHOLAS (V.O.)

It was just him and I... my son that is.

Before Franz can ask, Nicholas replies.

NICHOLAS (V.O.).O.

His mother didn't survive the birth and the grandparents disappeared shortly after.

Jo smashes her tiny fists into the cake, enjoying the smell and feeling of it.

NICHOLAS (V.O.)

I always guessed it was because he looked too much like their daughter. He was the only thing I had left of her.

Otto hands a smiling Ruth a napkin to clean Jo up. The voiceover ends.

OTTO

(laughing)

My God, she eats like Franz.

RUTH

(solemnly)

She's my miniature him.

INT. BOOTCAMP TENT, GERMANY - NIGHT

Franz sits up in bed, interested in what else Nicholas has to share.

FRANZ

I'm so sorry. Here I was going on
about my life when-

NICHOLAS

Don't worry about it.

Nicholas pets a tired Vera.

NICHOLAS

He and I were best friends when he
was growing up...

He hesitates this next part.

NICHOLAS

That's why I told him if he was
going to enlist then I sure as hell
would too.

FRANZ

Where's he stationed?

NICHOLAS

(takes a deep breath)
He- well he actually passed a
couple months back.

Vera senses a change in mood and moves closer to Nicholas.

FRANZ

I'm so sorry.

NICHOLAS

(petting Vera)
I figured I'd come out here and try
my best to avenge him.

NICHOLAS

I can understand that.

NICHOLAS

He was about 50 miles north at
another camp and was found dead in
no man's land.

FRANZ

I don't know what to say-

NICHOLAS

(laughs)
Neither do I... trouble is. Killing
people isn't going to bring him
back.

FRANZ
Of course not.

NICHOLAS
So I thought, maybe I could try
saving a few...

There's an air of sadness that surrounds the men. It's entirely possible both of them could meet the same fate.

There's a long pause. Both men sit in the silence and listen to the sounds of nature outside.

NICHOLAS
Always did want a daughter though.

Nicholas slides into bed.

NICHOLAS
Just me and my memories now.

Vera moves even closer to him to where he barely has any room.

NICHOLAS
(to Vera)
And you, of course.

Franz doesn't know what to say. He simply lies down.

ANGLE ON: wind blowing out the candle on their nightstand.

INT. BOOTCAMP TENT, ENGLAND - NIGHT

James readies himself for bed while Joe pulls the covers over himself.

JOE
I never would have taken Henry for
being the bairn of the family.

JAMES
No one ever does.

James pulls back his sheets.

JAMES
I guess that's what happens when
yer man of the house at fifteen.

JOE
And his sisters?

JAMES
Never met 'em.

James looks over at Joe and gives a soft smile.

JAMES
The lot o' them got hitched before
the parents died. They came back
just to collect what little the
will granted 'em.

JOE
Farmers never have much to give

JAMES
Is that so?

JOE
My pa left one thing when he passed
(pauses)
Debt.

JAMES
And yet here ya are... eatin'
rations and playin' with bayonets.

JOE
I have to be here.

James' voice raises a little. There really isn't a reason for
Joe to be here, not when he has a family and farm to support
at home.

JAMES
Yer mom think so too?

JOE
Well she certainly doesn't want any
white feathered son.

JAMES
You wouldn't have been branded a
coward if you stayed home.

Joe turns over and away from James. James lays on his cot.

JAMES
Yer already such a pain in my arse.

Joe turns over slightly to face James from over his shoulder.
He doesn't know what James will say next.

JAMES
But a pain I intend to keep.

INT. BOOTCAMP TENT, ENGLAND - MORNING

Words display over the screen: TWO MONTHS LATER

Henry's sits on his cot dressed in his brown uniform. He's writing a letter. His bunkmate is gone and the rising sun has caused light to spill inside from the tent entrance.

ANGLE ON: "Dear Ruthie,"

Henry takes a deep breath and begins to write.

EXT. GREENOCK, SCOTLAND - AFTERNOON

Ruth walks into the house carrying a bundle of letters. She flips through them quickly and then drops the stack once she finds one with familiar handwriting on the envelope. She stands still on the steps to her house. She forgoes a letter opener and tears into the envelope.

MONTAGE:

A voiceover of Henry reading the letter plays over footage of the men marching to the front.

HENRY (V.O.)

Dear Ruthie, you'll be happy to know that-

We see James and Henry walk in line holding their bayonets. Joe runs up behind him causing James to throw an arm over his shoulder. The three men laugh at something James has said.

HENRY (V.O.)

James and I have finally made a new friend, a young boy from Earlston. I've shown him a photo of you and he agrees you're the most beautiful woman to have ever lived.

We see Henry opens his rations and grimaces at the sight of soggy bread and beans.

HENRY (V.O.)

The food here is... manageable. Unfortunately, I've been told it will only get worse once we reach the trenches.

We see Henry place his bayonet against a dirt wall. They are now in the trenches. James is a couple meters ahead of him saluting a general.

Henry looks behind him to find Joe staring at the top of the dirt wall. The enemy lies on the other side.

HENRY (V.O.)

As promised, I've managed to keep
my wits together. Our General
Everton is a decent fellow,

We see Everton yell at the men and forces one to drop into pushups. It's James.

HENRY (V.O.)

However, I'm not sure he's a huge
fan of James. But then again, who
is?

INT. KITCHEN - GREENOCK, SCOTLAND

Ruth holds Henry's letter. She laughs through her tears and brings a hand to her face to wipe them.

HENRY (V.O.)

Please do not hesitate to send more
letters my way. I've sent word to
Mrs. Crocker and she'll cover the
postage cost until I can pay her
back in full.

We're back inside the tent from the beginning. Henry smiles to himself as he writes the next line.

HENRY (V.O.)

Though, I did tell her you'd cook
for her once a week.

Henry folds the letter and slips it into an envelope.

HENRY (V.O.)

In all honesty, it has been hard
managing since I've left my heart
and soul with you in Greenock.

Henry exits the tent and places his cap on his head.

HENRY (V.O.)

I love you forever, signed Henry
Stewart.

Henry hands the letter off to a young man carrying a parcel bag. He takes a deep breath and walks off.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. ENGLISH TRENCHES - FRANCE - MORNING

Henry, James, and Joe take a moment to themselves to finish whatever food they've been given. They are all covered in grime and dried blood. They lean against the dirty, wooden trench wall. It's dark and cloudy out, only the lights of lanterns illuminate them.

JOE
Happy Samhain

HENRY
Ay, happy samhain

James looks around at the soldiers, all tired. Some wounded. It's hard to believe it's already been a month.

JAMES
No need to dress up as ghosts,
goblins and demons this year

James looks at the top of the trenches.

JAMES
They're just on the other side.

INT. GERMAN TRENCHES - FRANCE - MORNING

Franz wears a dried, bloody apron as he changes a bandage on a young soldier's arm. The wounded soldier sits on a table as Franz cleans his wound.

They're in the trench's surgery room. Vera sits in the corner licking her paws.

There are sounds of gunfire, yelling, and screaming behind them.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
You're good at this, but I was told
you're not this troop's surgeon?

FRANZ
(laughs)
That would be my bunkmate,
Nicholas.

Franz points to the dog in the corner.

FRANZ
And that's his dog, Vera

The dog lifts her head at the mention of her name. Both men smile at her.

A beat.

FRANZ

I'm actually a school teacher.

Franz laughs to himself.

FRANZ

You would not believe the amount of scrapes I've had to fix after silly fights in the yard.

WOUNDED SOLDIER

(smiles)

Nothing close to a stab wound though?

FRANZ

(laughing)

Not yet. Though, it can get pretty close at times.

A pause.

FRANZ

I was actually in training to become a doctor once.

WOUNDED SOLDIER

Before the war?

FRANZ

Before I met my wife.

Franz picks up another roll of bandages. He smiles.

FRANZ

Her brother was headmaster of the school. Figured I'd have a better shot at getting to know her if she had to see me every day.

WOUNDED SOLDIER

And where was that?

FRANZ

Dresden. It's a beautiful school named Schola Crusis. Very old though.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
That make you religious? "School of
the cross," is it not?

Franz wraps the bandage around the soldier's arm.

FRANZ
I actually converted to Catholicism
for my wife.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
(laughs)
That doesn't answer the question...

FRANZ
(soft, sad smile)
I'm religious enough to know this
is not where we should be as
civilized humans.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
I suppose I could agree with that.

The wounded soldier hops off the table. He clutches the
bandage with his good hand.

FRANZ
However, I still volunteered. So
whatever happens-

Franz looks out at the top of the trenches. There's sounds of
shouting and dirt falling.

FRANZ
It is only because I signed up for
it.

The wounded soldier gives a small smile and walks away. Franz
is left to clean the bloodied rags.

He stares at the dirty table, so many men have been bandaged,
cleaned up, or pronounced dead. Another young man walks in.

WOUNDED SOLDIER #2
General Fischer told me you'd be
able to help?

The new soldier clutches his right arm. It's clearly broken.

FRANZ
Of course I can!

Franz swipes all dirty bandages and rags to the floor.

WOUNDED SOLDIER #2
I was climbing the wall when-

FRANZ
No need.

Franz cuts away at the soldier's shirt to expose the heavily bruised arm. Bones threatening to cut through to the surface.

FRANZ
Talk to me about anything else...
how's your mom's cooking?

The wounded soldier attempts to laugh, he winces from the pain.

WOUNDED SOLDIER #2
Better than what we've been
eating...

FRANZ
(smiles)
The head surgeon will be in soon.

Franz grabs a flask and pours it into a wooden cup. He offers the water to the soldier. He graciously accepts.

WOUNDED SOLDIER #2
Where's he been?

Franz looks at the top of the trench wall.

FRANZ
(solemnly)
Amputations.

Franz looks to the soldier.

FRANZ
(soft smile)
But that won't be the case for you!
(pauses)
So... Your mom's cooking?

INT. ENGLISH RESERVE TRENCHES - FRANCE - LATER

Henry sits at a desk composing a letter as a bandaged soldier speaks aloud. He's begun to write letters back home for the soldiers who can no longer hold a pen.

A buff, meathead soldier stands in front of him. Just his biceps are the size of Henry's head.

SOLDIER
So? How's it look so far?

HENRY
(looking at the letter)
Well...

ANGLE ON: "Mary, I miss you. From, John."

HENRY
We could... do better?

SOLDIER
How? It says everything I feel.

HENRY
What about something like, "Dearest
Mary, they say war is hell but
being without you must be the ninth-
"

SOLDIER
Ninth what?

HENRY
Circle. The ninth circle of hell.

SOLDIER
Why would hell have circles?

HENRY
Because-
(pauses)
Actually. You know what? Let's just
tell her what you did today.

SOLDIER
(serious)
I killed two men.

HENRY
Let's just ask her what she did
today!

WE MOVE DOWN THE TRENCH

Seeing James checks supplies and keep track of what they have and what they need. He holds a wet piece of paper in his hand as he checks items off. It's raining now.

Seeing Joe speaks to General Everton. They have to almost shout to be heard above the sound of men, rain, and distant gunfire.

JOE

Sir, I've heard there's to be a trench rotation?

EVERTON

The front line is to be switched with our reserves. We'll be moving the 100 yards up to the support line soon.

JOE

Sir, is it alright if I ask when we're to make that move?

EVERTON

Private, I can ensure you, you'll be the last to know!

We see other men carry the injured. There's dirt and debris and blood everywhere. The only light comes from lanterns since the sun hasn't shown in a week.

CUT TO:

It's later now. The sun has set. Henry, James, and Joe sit against a dirt wall. They're barely covered against the forces. They pull their coats tighter as the wind travels through the trenches, turning them into a wind tunnel. Joe is visibly upset.

JAMES

What's got yer kilt ina twist?

JOE

I haven't found a way to make myself useful.

Joe fiddles with the pin on his kilt.

JOE

(to Henry)

You're now in charge of letters and makin sure everyone at home is updated.

JOE

(to James)

You're.. well you always "look" busy

JAMES

It's about finding a simple task and making it seem really *really* difficult.

James looks around to make sure no one can hear him.

JAMES

We also don't need as much whiskey
as I said we did.

Henry laughs and shakes his head.

HENRY

You don't *need* to be doing
anything. You're here... that's more
than the British army needs.

JAMES

The bastard's right. If you're not
doing anything, you're not any
closer to dying.

James leans forward and pulls the boys in.

JAMES

Now have either of yeh heard the
story of the banshee of Edinburgh?

Joe is visibly confused.

HENRY

(sighs)

James, tell a new one for once!

JOE

What do you mean?

JAMES

It's Samhain!! The night where the
veil between the dead and the
livin' has fallen.

JOE

Ma always said that was devil
worshippin'

JAMES

Well *Ma* ain't here.

James grabs his jacket and puts it over his head to resemble
an old hag.

JAMES

'Twas this night, not long ago,
when the Crathes Castle was built!

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE

We see Ruth's back as she stands at the stove occasionally stirring a pot of broth while cutting onions. A record plays in the background. Ruth's mother, FIONA THOMPSON, enters the kitchen.

FIONA
Too many carrots.

RUTH
(sarcastic)
Thank you, Mother.

Ruth pours all the chopped carrots into the stew.

FIONA
Didn't you hear me?

RUTH
Yes.

Ruth takes off her apron and lays it on the table. We see her long burnt orange dress to match the fall season. A celtic cross can be seen on her long necklace.

FIONA
Well now the dinner-

RUTH
Is horribly ruined, I know. Perhaps
everyone should leave?

Fiona, a well-to-do Londoner, scoffs. She and Ruth's dad have had to come live with her in the country side following Henry's departure.

FIONA
Ruth, that is incredibly rude.
We've all come a long way to
support you.

She picks up a plate of bread and butter.

FIONA
And our guests are waiting.

Ruth follows her into the dining room, the beef stew now poured into a serving bowl. A medley of men and women sit for dinner.

DUNCAN
(claps his hands)
What smells so delicious?

RUTH
Thank you, Pa.

DUNCAN THOMPSON, Ruth's father sits at the head of the table, a spot usually reserved for Henry. Ruth takes her place to his left sitting across from her mother.

DUNCAN
Happy Samhain!

The group of people smile and repeat it back.

FIONA
Duncan and I even have a special
surprise post dinner...

Ruth looks at the empty chair at the end of the table, one typically left for the departed souls on Samhain. She couldn't help but worry Henry's soul would soon find a seat there.

INT. BRITISH TRENCHES - NIGHT

James continues his story while Henry rolls his eyes. He's heard the same story every Samhain since he first met James.

JAMES
Now the Crathes Castle was not yet
haunted as Old Man Willie had just
moved in with his new lassie-

Men around the boys hear James speaking, they move closer to hear the story.

CUT TO:

James now has an audience of about twenty men. They all eagerly watch him tell his story. He's halfway finished.

JAMES
And so the lassie continued to hate
her and Old Man's Willie's kids!

James crouches down to his knees.

JAMES
(in a falsetto)
Please Ma don't take our puppy!

JAMES
(in a witchy voice)
He shall make a lovely stew.

The men laugh. Their smiles can be seen by the lanterns they hold near their face.

JAMES

But Old Man Willie kept wantin' a
bigger castle, so each year they'd
add more stones...

James pauses.

JAMES

And each year...

James screams the next line. He jumps forward to shake Joe's shoulders.

JAMES

(screams)

Another bairn would go missing!

Some men gasp, some men laugh. Joe screams in fear from James lunging.

JAMES

It was not until only a few years
ago that a *terrible* storm happened
and stones begin to fall over one
after another... after another.

James pauses again. He uses his hands to motion the stones falling.

JAMES

And what's revealed is the
decomposing flesh of the wee bairns
who now-

General Everton comes by.

EVERTON

(yelling)

PRIVATE JAMES ANDERSON!

JAMES

(whispers)

Shite.

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE

Ruth clears the plates from the table, everyone still in lively conversation.

A young man throws his napkin onto the table and grabs her arm.

CAMPBELL
That was a lovely dinner.

CAMPBELL HARRIS is an affluent man who works with Ruth's dad in London.

RUTH
Thank you, Campbell.

CAMPBELL
(smiles)
A shame Henry wasn't here for it.

Ruth smiles politely. It wasn't unknown that her parents would rather her become engaged to him rather than Henry.

RUTH
Of course, I- I feel the same.

Ruth hurries into the kitchen, almost dropping the plates as she puts them in the sink. Fiona enters.

FIONA
Where did we place the cake knife?

Ruth opens a drawer to her left.

FIONA
Perfect...

Her tone shifts.

FIONA
(cautious)
Are you alright?

RUTH
(clears her throat)
I'm fine, nothing wrong.

Ruth grabs a cake from a table. Fiona grabs the knife.

RUTH
Let's not keep them waiting. We've got trinkets to find.

Ruth enters the dining room once again and places the cake in the middle.

DINNER GUEST #1
Is this our surprise?

DUNCAN
A traditional Scottish Halloween
cake! My favorite.

Fiona passes the knife to Duncan.

FIONA
The key is to look for an object in
your slice.

CAMPBELL
Object?

Duncan cuts the first one.

FIONA
A coin symbolising future riches-
Duncan cuts another slice.

FIONA
A ring tells who will be married
soon.

She winks at Ruth.

DUNCAN
And a button...
He cuts another slice.

DUNCAN
You'll never marry.

DINNER GUEST #2
How exciting!

DINNER GUEST #1
And what about those of us who are
already married?

DUNCAN
I suppose they'll be a divorce!

Fiona hushes him.

FIONA
That's not proper.

She passes the slices out.

CAMPBELL
Are there any other surprises in
store?

RUTH
 There's always a few good ghost
 stories to pass around.

INT. BRITISH TRENCHES

The men stand to attention to General Everton.

EVERTON
 Is war not scary enough? You think
 you need these foolish ghost
 stories?

JAMES
 Sir, it's Samhain.

EVERTON
 I don't care if it's the bloody
 King's birthday. EVERYONE! Get back
 to your posts.

The men scurry back to wherever they had been before.

Everton approaches James.

EVERTON
 You'd do best to stay in line.

James grabs his bayonet and turns to leave. Everton grabs
 James' shoulder.

EVERTON
 The banshee...

JAMES
 Yes, Sir?

EVERTON
 It turned out to be Old Man
 Willie's scorned lover right?

JAMES
 (laughs)
 You know the story?

EVERTON
 My gran was a Scot.

Everton looks around to see others have stopped to see the
 rare display of kindness from him.

EVERTON
 ALRIGHT. BACK TO YOUR POSTS.

The soldiers who had previously paused rush off.

TRENCHES - FRANCE - LATER

Joe lies asleep against a dirt wall. James and Henry lie asleep next to him, using each other's shoulders for pillows.

A soldier approaches him quietly. They shake him awake.

MESSENGER

Private Scott?

JOE

(tired)

Mhm?

MESSENGER

General Everton needs to see you.

Joe looks at the sleeping figures of Henry and James. He slowly grabs his gun and follows the messenger.

WE MOVE THROUGH THE TRENCH

We see other men quietly dressing in uniform and grabbing their weapons.

Some men wipe a few tears from anticipation and fear.

Some men can't stop smiling, they're been itching to see action.

INT. EVERTON'S TENT - NIGHT

General Everton stands amongst a crowd of men. They talk in low voices.

JOE

You wanted to see me, Sir?

EVERTON

You stated you wanted to know when the rotation was occurring?

JOE

Yes, sir!

Everton looks toward the men. They stand at the ready with their bayonets fashioned against their shoulders.

EVERTON

We leave in ten.

Everton exits the makeshift room.

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE

The dinner party guests all cut into their slices. Duncan having found a coin and one of Ruth's neighbors having bit into a ring. All that was left was the button...

DUNCAN

It's apparent that Campbell and I will be particularly successful in the coming year!

CAMPBELL

And there's to be a wedding soon!

He lifts his glass in reference to the neighbor.

CAMPBELL

Congratulations.

She smiles back.

FIONA

That leaves a poor soul.

CAMPBELL

(laughing)
Perhaps I swallowed it!

Ruth politely laughs.

RUTH

It's more accurate that I most likely forgot to drop one in...

FIONA

What a bummer.

Ruth grabs her plate and excuses herself. She walks into the kitchen.

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE KITCHEN

ANGLE ON: plate of cake in Ruth's hand as she walks... a button is seen to be hidden under frosting. She washes the plate and throws away the button.

RUTH

We'll be having none of that.

INT. BRITISH TRENCHES

James stirs awake at the sounds of people moving. He looks to see Joe missing.

CUT TO:

Joe walks to the edge of the trench, where the ladder stands for the men to leave. There's a rush of adrenaline.

INT. ENGLISH FRONT LINE TRENCH - MOMENTS LATER

Wounded soldiers ready themselves to be relieved. Some throw dead men over their shoulders, others can barely hold themselves upright.

INT. GERMAN TRENCHES

Franz wakes up to the sound of yelling.

FRANZ

What's- what's happening?

NICHOLAS

The British, they're rotating lines.

FRANZ

What does that mean for us?

NICHOLAS

We have orders to attack.

Franz, sleep still in his eyes, grabs his coat and bayonet.

He enters the crowd of soldiers.

FISCHER

We need a small dispatch unit. Just enough to do some damage to the new soldiers coming in.

Franz looks around. He sees no one volunteering.

FRANZ

Sir I-

Before he can speak, Nicholas steps in front of him.

NICHOLAS

It would be an honor, sir.

INT. ENGLISH TRENCHES

James follows the quiet noise of soldiers as they hurry to get ready to leave. Everyone else is still sleeping.

EVERTON

The priority is covering our wounded.

Everton's voices meshes with Fischer's for the next line.

EVERTON

Don't expect for you all to make it.

Joe is visibly scared, he hasn't seen action yet but now it is his chance to prove himself as a soldier.

JOE

It's an honor, sir!

JAMES (O.C.)

Don't say that yet.

James joins the group. His uniform is disheveled from sleeping but he holds his head up high, along with his bayonet. He falls in line with the men. Joe is surprised.

EVERTON

(sighs)

And what's the meaning of this?

JAMES

I request to join the men, sir.

EVERTON

We have enough.

JAMES

I respectfully disagree, sir.

Everton looks between Joe and Henry.

EVERTON

Private Scott,

Joe looks up, he's worried.

EVERTON

You may return to your cot.

Joe looks at James but gets no response.

EVERTON
Private Scott!

JOE
But sir-

EVERTON
Alright men, we move out!

James stares straight ahead. He never wanted to see action but he knew he couldn't let Joe be the one to experience it firsthand.

JOE
(to James)
You couldn't just let me have this?

JAMES
(quiet)
Not a chance.

Joe exits.

END OF ACT 1

EXT. FRANZ'S HOUSE

Helene balances a young Jo on her hip while checking the mail. A neighbor approaches her.

NEIGHBOR
Still no word?

Helene smiles.

HELENE
For a school teacher he certainly
does not enjoy writing.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCHES -NIGHT

Franz follows Nicholas to the trench's ladder.

FRANZ
What are you doing?

Nicholas pulls his coat tighter, his breath is white in the air.

NICHOLAS
I'm fighting a war, Franz

FRANZ

You're the chief surgeon, there's
no need for you to do this.

Nicholas puts his foot on the ladder, readying himself to
climb up.

A dog's -Vera's- whimper can be heard.

NICHOLAS

Just keep Vera out of the way until
I'm back. I need to examine the
wounded.

Nicholas climbs up the ladder, Vera paws at the steps he
takes. Franz takes a deep breath and stares down at Vera.

He bends down and rubs her head.

FRANZ

Give it an hour, he'll be back.

EXT. ENGLISH TRENCHES

James follows Everton up the ladder. Once all the men have
reached the top, they stay low to the ground. The less height
they have the better. James looks down to see Joe walking
back to the cot. *Good, he'll sleep another night.*

EVERTON

(whispers)

Fall in line men, we're taking it
slow.

Some twenty yards ahead of them was their target: the front
trench. Their first line of defense. It was time to rotate
out the men and *attempt* to take the wounded back to the
reserve. The best time to do this was never, so they took
their chances in the dark night.

The soldiers followed Everton and slowly crawled their way
forward. Their breathing had to be slow and quiet, but inside
their hearts were pounding loudly.

JAMES

Fucking shite, it's cold.

A young man, walking behind James laughs.

CHARLIE

Didn't you *volunteer* for this?

JAMES

Before I bloody felt the wind.

James and CHARLIE share a small laugh. Everton gives them a dirty look, immediately shutting them up.

EXT. GERMAN TRENCHES

Fischer and his men slowly climb up the ladders. Binoculars in hand, he surveys the opposite land. Silently, he motions forward. The men follow their general.

FISCHER

We cannot afford to give away our exact position, so we need a good shot.

Nicholas looks forward. He can't see the men, it can't be him.

NICHOLAS

Sir?

FISCHER

Yes?

NICHOLAS

Might I recommend Oscar? I saw him in training and if anyone can do it-

A muscular, middle-ages man, OSCAR, steps forward. He's extremely tall and buff and holds his bayonet proudly... as if it's an extension of himself.

OSCAR

(nods)

I can do it.

He readies his gun, it looks childlike in his huge hands. He looks more soldier than anyone else.

He takes a deep breath.

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - NIGHT

The two groups of men slowly gain distance from their safety. With each step they inch closer and closer to combat.

The British soldiers saw the line of the trench mere yards ahead, all they had to do was-

BANG

Fischer turns to face Oscar.

FISCHER
My God, man.

CUT TO:

It happens in slow motion for James. The man beside him falls. Just three hours ago he had been laughing at his same old story, now he was losing blood rapidly. James sees the gunshot to the chest. War is all around him.

Gunfire explodes from both sides.

James drops to the ground and applies pressure to Charlie's wound.

JAMES
Hey, hey... it's fine. You're fine.

Charlie looks down at the wound and back up at James.

CHARLIE
(slowly)
I- I don't feel it...

He stares into James' eyes. James won't accept it.

JAMES
(yelling)
We need some help!

The rest of the men are locked in gunfire. Shooting and reloading as fast as their bayonets will allow.

JAMES
EVERTON!

After what feels like an eternity, Everton drops down beside James.

JAMES
It's Charlie, he's-

James is in shock.

JAMES
It's coming from the stomach.

Everton takes James hands and pull them off the wound.

EVERTON
He's already gone.

JAMES

He was just speaking-

James looks back at Charlie. His chest is no longer rising and falling. His eyes are lifeless.

EVERTON

Leave him.

James fights back. He's manic.

JAMES

He just needs more pressure. Some stitches.

Everton shakes James' shoulders.

EVERTON

ANDERSON!

James won't meet his eyes, he keeps looking at the body.

EVERTON

(solemnly)

He's gone, James.

Bullets fly above James and Everton's head. Everton stands up and runs away.

James silently grabs his bayonet and runs after Everton. He looks back momentarily to see the wide-open eyes of what was once his friend.

CUT TO:

Fischer and his men run towards the fire, they have to cut them off before they get to the front trench.

Men charge at one another, bayonets simultaneously stab and fire. There is a blur of uniforms. Only the moon's light and gunpowder sparks illuminate who is from which side.

ANGLE ON: Nicholas charging from behind.

Nicholas, a man who joined to save lives -- not take them -- sees the killing close and personal. He looks lost in the chaos of death and violence. His knuckles are white grasping at his bayonet. Bullets seem to miss him from all directions.

ALEXANDER

HELP! PLEASE! SOMEONE!

Nicholas quickly looks to the right. He sees a British soldier lying in a ditch with blood pouring from a wound in his leg.

NICHOLAS

Don't move!

Ignoring the gunfire and screams of soldiers, Nicholas jumps into the ditch.

NICHOLAS

Don't move. We've got to stop the bleeding.

The British soldier tries to crawl backwards, he's sure he will be killed by the opposing side's soldier.

ALEXANDER

Don't-

Nicholas kneels beside him and places his bayonet on the ground.

NICHOLAS

There's not much I can do here...
it's obvious you need the bullet
removed but I can't do that here.

Nicholas takes off his belt and wraps it above the wounded area. The soldier winces in pain.

ALEXANDER

I'm going to die, aren't I?

Bullets continue to fly in all directions. It's a miracle neither of them have been hit yet. Nicholas pauses, looks down, and tightens the belt.

ALEXANDER

Why are you helping me?

NICHOLAS

(pauses)
I don't know.

Nicholas pulls the belt as tight as he can. He rips a piece of fabric from his shirt to place around the bullet wound.

NICHOLAS

Just keep pressure.

Alexander holds down on the fabric, red blood pools around his hand.

Just as Nicholas looks up to smile, a bullet rains through him. Red blood pours out from his chest as he falls forward onto the man's leg.

CUT TO:

James is in a cloud of smoke from all the gunfire. He can't see the man in front of him. All he can tell is he's not British due to the color of his uniform. *How cowardly to kill a man without facing him*, he thinks. He raises his weapon and takes the shot. The man falls.

EVERTON

FALL BACK!

Everton raises his hands and ushers his men to the direction they came from.

EVERTON

IF YOU CAN LIFT A WOUNDED, RUN LIKE
HELL WITH 'EM.

James' eyes dart all over the wet, cold dirt. Nothing will grow in this ground for a hundred years. He spots a British soldier at the bottom of a ditch with a German lifeless on top of him. He runs into the ditch.

JAMES

Are you alright??

ALEXANDER

Does it look like it?!

James gets closer and pulls Nicholas off of him.

JAMES

(smiling)

My God, Alex. How did you manage
doing *this* with a broken leg?

ALEXANDER

I didn't. He was helping me.

James looks down at the dead German soldier.

JAMES

(slow)

What?

Alexander points his head in the direction of the tied belt.

ALEXANDER
He saved my life.

INT. GERMAN TRENCHES - LATER

The German soldiers climb back down into the trench. Franz waits on his cot with Vera.

FISCHER (O.C)
Franz.

Fischer looks at the entrance and sees a solemn Fischer. He stands to attention while Vera pops her head up.

FRANZ
Yes, Sir?

Fischer shakes his head and places his cap on Nicholas' cot next to Franz's.

FRANZ
No...

He looks at Vera.

FRANZ
That can't be true... I just saw him. He wasn't even supposed to-

His voice cracks. Fischer walks over to Vera and pets her behind the ears.

FISCHER
I know.

A beat.

FISCHER
Saddest part is there's no one to notify.

Vera looks around the room, searching for a sign of her owner.

FRANZ
Not even a cousin?

Fischer shakes his head.

FISCHER
(nods towards Vera)
Just her.

FRANZ

And me.

INT. BRITISH FIELD HOSPITAL - 3 DAYS LATER

Alex lays in a makeshift hospital bed with James sitting beside him.

JAMES

I take it a bullet to the leg is
all it takes to get some decent
rest around here

Alex groans in pain as he re-adjusts himself.

ALEXANDER

I'll gladly switch places if you'd
like.

JAMES

Fuck's no.

A young nurse, SOPHIE, enters. She's a voluntary aid detachment working out of the field hospital. She's much too pretty and innocent to be around such horrors.

SOPHIE

Private, it's time to change your
dressings.

JAMES

On second thought...

James stands to attention and smiles at Sophie.

JAMES

Private James Anderson at your
service.

He fakes a salute.

SOPHIE

If you could move?

Sophie squeezes by him and pulls the bed sheet from Alex's leg. She carefully redresses the wound. His leg still in one piece but the stitches are coarse and dirty.

ALEXANDER

Thank you.

Sophie smiles politely.

SOPHIE

It's imperative we keep this clean.
We do not want an amputation.

Alex's eyes grow wide and he looks with fear at James

JAMES

(shakes head)
That's not going to happen, Alex.

Sophie looks up from the leg at James and rolls her eyes.

SOPHIE

I don't recall you being a
doctor...

JAMES

Perhaps I will be after the war?

ALEXANDER

(laughs)
That's not going to happen either.

INT. BRITISH TRENCHES

Henry sits at a table writing a letter

ANGLE ON: "Dear Ruthie," written at the top with nothing else
on the page.

Joe sits beside him.

JOE

Can you believe that?

HENRY

(confused)
Believe what?

JOE

Have you not been listening to a
word I've said?

HENRY

In truth, I'm having some trouble
with the idea of words right now...

He places his pen on top of the letter.

JOE

(annoyed)
James must think he's some hero
now!

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

If he had let me go I would have been the one saving Alex's life.

HENRY

You don't know that... you very well **could** have been Alex.

Henry takes a swig of water from his canteen.

HENRY

Unfortunately, it looks like we're in this for a while.

He sighs.

HENRY

They'll be plenty of other opportunities to prove yourself.