PROVIDENCE

Written by

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## OVER BLACK

Heavy breathing is heard at the forefront of gunfire and explosions. The breathing steadily increases in tandem with thunderous explosions and clattering gunfire.

FADE IN:

#### EXT. INTERIOR OF A TRENCH - DAY

Sandbags line the top of the trench. A MAN's face leans against a wall of dirt, the stock of his rifle against his face, his hands tightly gripping its barrel. The man's firm grasp is broken for a moment as he clutches the small gold cross around his neck, he brings it to up to his lips. The sharp sound of a whistle precedes a roaring yell from the men around him. The man shuts his eyes and grits his teeth, lunging up and out of the trench.

CUT TO BLACK:

## OVER BLACK

The drumming of explosions returns. Building side by side with it is gunfire. A chaotic symphony of heavy machinery.

FADE IN:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - SEPTEMBER 1918 - DAY

Quiet. The remnants of a battlefield. Dense mud intertwined with layers of barbed wire. Deep craters sporadically positioned in the wet ground. A foggy steam rises up from the earth. Bodies lay scattered about.

# EXT. THE TRENCH - DAY

SOLDIERS lumber through. Their faces hardened, darkened with dried mud. The man clutches his gold cross as he walks. He stumbles towards the back and rests his tired body against the dirt wall. His eyes well up as the pain rushes through him. He holds the necklace tighter and falls asleep.

INT. A DUGOUT SECTION OF THE TRENCH - NIGHT

The man from earlier sits upright in a carved out section of the trench wall, the sleeping quarters for the soldiers. Sergeant HENRY (late-twenties), a member of the British Expeditionary Force since the onset of the war. A dimly lit lantern hangs from a thin wire above him. He holds a tiny, but thick black book in his hand. He quietly reads to himself. Another soldier ducks into the enclosure. In his attempt to sit down he kicks over a metal bowl, the clattering interrupts Henry's reading.

#### HENRY

What time is it?

The question startles the soldier, PRIVATE DALY (late-teens), who turns around quickly. His slim face temporarily fattened by the layers of dirt covering it.

DALY I'm sorry sir. I didn't think anyone was here.

Sergeant Henry grabs the lantern above him and shines it closer to the sergeant pin on his uniform lapel.

DALY (CONT'D) Oh. I'm sorry sir- I, I mean Sergeant. I just got off watch.

HENRY Well then you can relax. Take a seat. Private?

DALY Daly. Private Daly.

HENRY

Henry.

He extends his hand out for a handshake. They shake. Private Daly sits down in the dugout wall.

DALY Have you anything to eat?

Henry gestures to the spilled stew dripping from the knocked over bowl.

DALY (CONT'D) Oh.. Sorry.

Sergeant Henry smirks and shakes his head. He pulls a box of crackers from inside his jacket and hands them to Daly.

DALY (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Private Daly tears into the sleeve of crackers, shoveling one after the other into his mouth. Henry predictably hands a canteen to Daly after he starts coughing.

HENRY Take it easy son. If you can't be calm in here, you'll never be calm out there.

Private Daly takes a large swig of the canteen, finally catching his breath.

DALY I saw them.. Out in my post.. I can hear them, singing. I can see the light of their cigarettes. They're so close.

HENRY We're as close to them as they are to us.

Private Daly rests his head back against the dirt wall.

DALY Do you know when we're moving? (his voice softer) Do you know where we're going next? (his voice trails off) Do you know when..

Daly's eyes close and he falls asleep.

Sergeant Henry returns to reading his book.

EXT. FRENCH VILLAGE OF MARCOING - MORNING

Sunlight struggles through the clouds. A layer of foggy dew floats through the air, a grayness fills the trenches. Sergeant Henry nudges the sleeping Daly.

DALY What time is it?

Corporal STANIC, a seasoned soldier who has been with the company about as long as Sergeant Henry, answers sarcastically while lighting a cigarette.

> STANIC Time for morning tea sunshine.

HENRY (to Daly) Tanks need to get through, find a pair of shears and lets go.

INT. TRENCH - DAY

Private Daly races around from one solider to the next asking where he can find "large scissors", finally someone launches a pair in his direction. He jumps to the side rather embarrassingly, which causes a laugh from some MEN and Corporal Stanic. Corporal Stanic follows Henry down the trench. Daly picks up the cutters hurries to catch up to them.

EXT. BEHIND THE FRONT LINE - DAY

Muddy, ragged, and wet terrain.

Sergeant Henry takes out a notepad and while observing the area, begins writing.

Daly is hunched over cutting away wire after wire entangled in chunks of mud.

Stanic stands guard with his rifle calmly resting in his hands.

STANIC (to Henry) Drawing us another masterpiece sarge?

Henry doesn't respond.

DALY (to Stanic) What's he drawing?

HENRY I'm mapping the layout of this area. So that the tanks can know where they can fit. And so far the best path, is this point here.

He points to the ground just a few yards in front of them.

STANIC Are you sure? It's awful tight.

HENRY They'll make it through. DALY You're drawing all of that on sight and memory?

STANIC This is nothing. The man has the best memory there is. If he sees it, he'll never forget it. (to Henry) Isn't that right?

Henry ignores the comment and continues mapping on his notepad.

STANIC (CONT'D) My goodness Daly! How long can this possibly take you?

DALY It's the mud, it keeps clogging on the blades.

Daly rushes through cutting the remaining wire.

DALY (CONT'D) Is this good?

Stanic and Daly both look up at Henry. His eyes are gazing across the field, but his mind seems to wander elsewhere.

HENRY That'll do.

INT. TRENCH - DAY

The men walk over to Lieutenant DUNHAM. Henry hands him the paper from his notepad. Dunham looks it over for a few seconds in between the puffs on his pipe. He hands it to the YOUNG SOLDIER to his left.

> DUNHAM Run this back to Major Davidson.

The young soldier takes the paper and runs back through the lines, his boots smashing through the muddy pits.

DUNHAM (CONT'D) With the bridge secured and the Marks on their way. Hell, we might be out of here by Christmas.

Dunham says with a smirk.

HENRY How many are coming?

DUNHAM I was told 5. Maybe 10 if we're lucky. Jerry seems content with holding.

He lifts his boot from the muddy ground.

DUNHAM (CONT'D) Perhaps they are hoping we'll sink right into this ground.

INT. INTERIOR OF TRENCH - DAY

Stanic is leaning against the trench wall, chatting with two other soldiers, EARL and WALCOTT. Daly shifts his way near them.

STANIC For all the shit brought upon us by them. I must say, I still fancy those helmets.

EARL Not this again..

STANIC

They have those, and were sitting here with these tin pans no deeper than the pots we piss in.

WALCOTT If you're so bloody keen about their dam hats, just strip down and swap uniforms with them.

STANIC

That idea isn't half bad. I'm sure they're serving good beer over there too.

EARL

That'll spur their retreat, a naked Stanic charging towards them.

Earl and Walcott bust out in laughter, Daly forces a chuckle trying to fit in.

WALCOTT You there, what's your name? DALY

Daly sir.

EARL

Sir?

STANIC Oh you didn't hear? Daly here has been promoting everyone. You might be a general soon enough.

They laughter returns as Daly sits awkwardly by trying to join in. Walcott grins and glances at Stanic, who shakes his head and turns forward.

> WALCOTT (to Daly) You have any cigs?

# DALY

Cigs?

WALCOTT Yes cigs, as in cigarettes. Can you hand me one I'm all out.

DALY I don't have any.

WALCOTT You what? You don't have any?

EARL Jesus mate how long have you been over here?

DALY Six days. I think.

WALCOTT

Six days! You've been here six days and you're already out a whole carton?

DALY

I traded mine.

WALCOTT What on earth could you have traded for?

Daly reaches back into his pack and pulls out an extra canteen. Earl and Walcott lean back laughing harder now.

# An extra canteen?!

Laughing continues. Daly looks confused.

STANIC Heavens me Daly, you traded for that? Look around us.

Stanic turns towards the dead bodies in the field.

STANIC (CONT'D) There are plenty of canteens not being used.

WALCOTT I hope there's some good scotch in that canteen or else you were robbed.

They laugh a bit more and then it subsides.

DALY

I can get some.

WALCOTT Yeah good idea, you know what? Ask ole Henry there if you can borrow some of his.

EARL Yeah he'll be happy to share.

The gullible Daly begins to walk towards Henry before Stanic reaches out and grabs his arm, shaking his head "no"

DALY What? He doesn't have any?

STANIC He doesn't smoke.

EARL No smoking and no drinking, that's how he's always been.

WALCOTT That's why his mind is sharp and his aim always precise.

EARL I don't recall ever hearing him swear come to think of it. He's a real angel. Engel des todes.

DALY What's that?

STANIC "Angel of Death".

Daly looks over at Sergeant Henry, sitting peacefully, entranced by his small black bible.

WALCOTT Nobody knows for sure how many he's killed.

STANIC Nobody but him, that is.

WALCOTT Some say 50 or 60, others think his next will be his 100th.

EARL With just the rifle on his shoulder he took out a scouting unit of 10, got low on bullets, and killed the

WALCOTT

last three with his pistol.

That was nothing, after his brother died. He gunned down 20 in a hay field. Jack Stamford was there, said he was in a berserker like fury.

EARL

Heard it was 22 to be exact. But he was calm, calculated. No sense of rage within him. It was like it was nothing to him.

DALY

Is that true? Did he really do that? Is his brother really-

STANIC

(interrupting) That's enough now boys. Everyone's past is their past, no sense clogging it up with rumors.

Stanic says waving his hand.

DALY How can anyone even keep count?

STANIC Oh he remembers all of them..

A YOUNG BOY, not a day older than 15 Daly thinks, comes by handing out small bowls of brown stew. Each man quickly grabs one and digs in.

INT. TRENCH ENCLOSURE - DAY

A cracking gunfire wakes up a startled Daly. He nervously glances outside. Henry has been sitting near him as he slept.

HENRY You know I'm actually impressed you're able to sleep that soundly.

DALY (nervous) What did I miss?

Henry smirks and hands Daly his canteen of water.

HENRY Relax. Take a sip. We're all still here.

DALY Do you know our next attack? I heard rumors it was tomorrow, is that true?

HENRY They don't tell us that Daly. They just tell us go, and we go.

DALY Well when do you think it will be?

Henry ignores Daly's question.

HENRY Where are you from Daly?

DALY I'm from Durham.

HENRY Ah! A fellow' northerner, good lad.. And what do you do back home? DALY

I was going to school.

HENRY

Right then, of course you were.. How about if this whole mess hadn't started, what would you be doing then? After your schooling is finished.

DALY I don't know... A farmer.

HENRY

A farmer?

DALY On my family's farm.

HENRY

I see.

DALY

Well.. Maybe when I'm done with school it will be something different, especially after this. Who knows what we'll be going back too.

HENRY Everything has changed now hasn't it?

DALY

And you? What did you do?

Sergeant Henry looks out at the surrounding trench. Empty cans and metal plates float in the small craters of mud. A rat dashes across the ground, hopping from one puddle to the next, sniffing each plate searching for the last bit of food.

## HENRY

That's all done now Daly.

He's barely heard over the moans of some nearby wounded, Daly looks around nervously, his worried eyes darting around the trench, frantic.

HENRY (CON'T) (CONT'D) You have a light Daly?

Henry pulls a thin cigarette from his breast pocket. Daly searches through his pockets, pulling a lighter he didn't know he still had. He lights Henry's cigarette. The puff of dark smoke merges with the thick air around them.

HENRY (CONT'D) Everything has changed..

INT. GERMAN TRENCH - DAY

A group of GERMAN SOLDIERS sit around a tree stump, a few cards scattered on top. ERICH, a young blonde haired soldier, is in the middle of a story.

ERICH We were in town together at the festival, the day after I got back. I had my fair share of pints throughout the day. The real stuff, not that piss you boys are peddling north of the Rhine.

He snickers across at one of the soldiers across from him, drawing a laugh from the other two.

ERICH (CONT'D) But I knew she was looking at me. Even from across that long table I knew. I could feel her eyes on me. So I looked over..

He stands up in the small space in the trench.

ERICH (CONT'D)

She had..

He motions his hands in front of his chest, causing the soldiers to chuckle.

ERICH (CONT'D) So I got up. Walked right over. Smiled this same beautiful smile, and introduced myself.

He says grinning.

ERICH (CONT'D) And soon enough we were having a roll in the field behind the tent. Still got the grass in my boots, look. A solider leans over and Erich kicks up some mud, the soldier recoils back, to the others amusement.

OTTO No you didn't. Kristian told me you finished your seventh pint, spilt the rest on the girl. Then fell asleep in the field, alone.

ERICH Ah he was too drunk to know the truth.

Erich sits back down against the mud wall. He reaches into his pocket, dismayed to not find any cigarettes.

ERICH (CONT'D) (to Otto) Got any?

Otto shakes his head.

ERICH (CONT'D)

Hey..

He snaps his finger at the SOLDIER across from him, the solider has is hand out feeding the small dog next to him.

ERICH (CONT'D) Hey it's uh.. It's Adi, right?

The solider, ADI (early-twenties), nods his head yes.

ERICH (CONT'D) What's the dog's name?

ADI

Fuchsl.

OTTO "Little fox". That's a clever name. He looks like one too.

ERICH How about a trade?

He pulls out a small jar of jam.

ERICH (CONT'D) For your tobacco. I'm sure "little fox" would enjoy it. Adi grabs the cigarettes out of his pocket and throws them to Erich, who hands him the jar of jam. Erich happily lights himself a cigarette.

> OTTO You're the new runner?

Adi nods.

Erich lifts up his boot and brushes off some of the thick mud.

> ERICH I suspect you won't be doing much of that here.

Adi opens the new jar and feeds some to Fuchsl.

ERICH (CONT'D) So what's your story?

ADI

My story?

ERICH Yeah, everyone's got a story from on leave.

OTTO Some embellish there's more than others.

ERICH (to Otto) You're just jealous. (to Adi) What about you? Tell us.

ADI Well, I was in Berlin for 2 weeks.

ERICH Uh huh. And?

ADI And it was good.

OTTO Who was good?

ADI

Who?

ERICH Yes "who" was good?

ADI

What?

ERICH What did you do there?

ADI

I uh, I rode my bike through the city. Walked around the streets. Went to plays, concerts, museums.

Erich scratches his forehead and shares a confused look with Otto.

ERICH You're telling us. You left the front line, for 2 weeks. And all you did was ride your bike and watch plays?

ADI Yes. Why? What did you expect?

ERICH I don't know. Just something a little more exciting.

OTTO Maybe some people have had enough excitement over the past few years Erich. (to Adi) Isn't that right?

He points to the two *Iron Cross* medals on the left side of Adi's shirt.

OTTO (CONT'D) Where'd you get that?

ADI

Ypres.

OTTO And that one?

ADI Passchendale.

ERICH You were there too? ADI

I was. If you think the mud is bad here. Should have seen it there. We had constant shifts of buckets trying to drain our trench. It was like the earth was sinking.

OTTO

Wettest month on record they said.

ADI

It was. We tried relaying and running back and forth as fast we could. Quickly we got stranded, overrun. Everyone stuck in those ditches.

OTTO What did you do?

ADI To be honest, I don't know why I got it. All I was trying to do was stay alive. And was one of the lucky few that day.

ERICH My brother was there.

Erich dips his head and reaches into his coat pocket, pulling out a picture of his brother and handing it to Adi.

ERICH (CONT'D) He was 16. Just a kid.

Adi shakes his head, not recognizing him.

ADI A lot were. Most of the unit. They were just students a few months before.

OTTO Thrown into this.

Erich places the photo back in his coat, wiping his face with his hand to compose himself.

ERICH We all are. Thrown into this, for what I don't even know.

ADI You don't know?

ERTCH Look around us. We're stuck in this shit. And so are they. A grind with no end in sight. ADI Don't talk that nonsense. ERICH It's the truth. ADI Is it? ERICH Yeah. What do you think? That its some glorious honor we're fighting for? ADI I know why. It's something you realize once you're among it. Then you'll know.

ERICH

Know what?

ADI Why we're here. For land? For glory or honor? (shaking his head) No. When you're out there you realize that you're here for your comrades next to you. Those kids, they went out arm and arm, they didn't know yet how to fight like men, but they learned how to die like soldiers. Die for the cause, die for Germany.

OTTO (in German) Gott mit uns. (God with us)

A young soldier, KARL, comes stumbling through the crowded trench, he holds a piece of paper in his hand, he shows the paper to a few of the soldiers, they shake their heads and point further down the trench. He walks over to Otto, Erich and Adi.

> KARL Excuse me, I'm looking for..

His foot slips and he drops the paper into the mud.

# KARL (CONT'D)

Shit..

Erich picks up the muddy paper, he looks it over and then hands it to Adi.

KARL (CONT'D) I'm looking for-

ADI (interrupting) Yes.

Karl reaches into his shirt pocket and hands an envelope to Adi.

KARL It's from Captain Klaus. Needs it delivered to Colonel Pommel.

ADI

I see that.

Adi stands and grabs his helmet. He hands Otto the jar of jam.

ADI (CONT'D) Look after him for me. I'll be back.

He pets Fuchsl on the head and then makes his way down the trench.

INT. BRITISH TRENCH - NIGHT

Sergeant Henry cleans some mud off the barrel of his rifle. Private Daly sits across from him, Walcott and Stanic next to him. Daly stares up into the sky, his leg nervously shakes. Walcott lights the cigarette in Stanic's mouth. He notices the nervous Daly and hands him a cigarette. Daly quickly takes it, his hand shaking to light it. Walcott leans over and lights it for him.

> WALCOTT This is the worst part. DALY What is? STANIC The waiting.

# WALCOTT We all feel it.

Daly looks over at the relaxed demeanor of Sergeant Henry calmly wiping the barrel. It's an act of meditation now. The dirt has all been removed, the rifle as clean as it was when he first got it.

# DALY

All of us?

Walcott and Dunham look over at Henry as well.

WALCOTT We were all where you were at one point.

STANIC Try and get some sleep.

DALY Huh? Sleep? How can I sleep?

Henry overhears the conversation.

HENRY

Because it's the only thing we can do now.

Henry places his rifle down.

HENRY (CONT'D) You know why the waiting is the worst part? Because none of us, on our side or there's, has any idea what is going happen.

DALY I know that. It's why I can't sleep thinking about it.

HENRY

Then don't think about it. Think of your training, think of your farm back home... Or think of nothing. But the worry, worrying about what might happen, it's a waste. It won't change anything.

DALY Some of us aren't like you. Yes you are. Everyone is. Every second I'm here my mind tells me to run. Just drop my rifle and sprint as fast as I can away from this place. It sounds like the right idea, but its just cowardice disguised as reason.

### DALY

How do you get through it?

HENRY Instinct. It's instinct from selfpreparation. To protect myself, protect those with me, those back home. It's all on instinct. Instinct to survive.

He rests his head back, clutching the black book in his hand.

HENRY (CONT'D) Get some sleep now lads.

Henry says closing his eyes.

Daly takes a deep pull on his cigarette. He looks over at Walcott and Stanic, the two following Henry's order, they lean their heads against the trench wall and close their eyes. Daly closes his eyes and rests his head back. His leg still shaking from the nerves.

## EXT. BATTLEFIELD - MORNING

Mist rises from the ground between the two trenches. The field is quiet. A few lights start to flicker on from the trenches, tiny bursts of fire lighting the morning cigarettes. A hum builds from a distance. It grows louder as it gets closer. Artillery shells blast from the distance. A bombardment of explosions collide against the ground, splashes of muddy water erupt from the field.

# INT. BRITISH TRENCH - MORNING

Daly grips his rifle tight against his chest. He slowly lifts his head to a vantage point to see the ground above him.

STANIC Keep your bloody head down! Stanic reaches over and forces Daly down into the trench. The barrage continues for several seconds. The bombs decrease in interval.

A BRITISH OFFICER readies his whistle.

# BRITISH OFFICER Steady now boys!

The men position themselves up against the front wall of the trench. The bombs start to fade.

BRITISH OFFICER (CONT'D)

Steady!

The officer yells holding his pistol in the air, his eyes on his watch. He grabs his whistle and brings it close to his mouth. The searing sound of the whistle rings through the trench, a collective yell from the boys on the ground. They flow over the wall, met swiftly with defensive gunfire.

Stanic and Walcott climb over. After them Henry and Daly.

EXT. MIDDLE OF BOTH TRENCHES "NO MANS LAND" - CONTINUOUS

A sea of soldiers storm towards the German trench. Staggering through the erupting earth around them.

INT. NO MANS LAND - CONTINUOUS

Daly follows behind Walcott and Stanic. A blast nearby knocks Walcott over. Daly rushes over to help him up. Both of them push forward right into the line of enemy gunfire, Walcott is shot and falls, dying instantly.

Henry rushes from behind them all, firing his rifle. He forces a frozen Daly forward into a explosive-made ditch. The shell-shocked Daly covers his face with his hands. As Henry stands firing his rifle.

#### HENRY

We gotta move!

Daly keeps his hands up to his face. Curled in a fetal position, terrified.

HENRY (CONT'D) On your feet lets go!

Henry forces Daly's rifle back into his hands. He turns back to fire off some cover. The two re-join the charge forward. Daly fires his gun into the grey abyss in front of him. He can hardly see, his firing a result of fear more than tactic.

HENRY (CONT'D) Just keep Firing!

The confident pair resumes their charge. As they approach the barbed wire fence, nearing their end, a large explosion rips the earth from under them into the air.

CUT TO BLACK:

## INT. NO MANS LAND - SOMETIME LATER

Muffled sounds ring through his head. Henry digs himself from under the dirt pile. A cloud of smoke so dense Henry can hardly see his hand in front of him. He stumbles through, cautiously stepping across the field. His foot kicks the arm of a fallen solider. He bends down, uncovering the dirtcovered face of the now deceased Daly. A profound silence has now resonated through the field, either his eardrums were damaged or the gunfire has all but ceased.

Henry grabs Daly's rifle and continues his way into the German trench, he faintly hears the cheers from his victorious countrymen.

#### INT. GERMAN TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

A shell-shocked Adi stumbles through the dense smoke. He holds his arm out to guide himself. A small break in the smoke clears and he can see an open path of retreat, he moves quickly.

In that moment he bumps into an oncoming Henry. Adi is knocked to the ground. He looks up at the towering Henry, his hands up in a plea of mercy. Henry points the gun a few inches from his face. The tip of the gun pointing right into Adi's helpless eyes, young eyes appearing no older then the now closed ones of Daly. Henry's hand grips the trigger, inches from another countless enemy killed.

#### INT. BRITISH MEDICAL TENT - SOMETIME LATER

Henry stands over a wounded Stanic. He sits down on the edge of a table next to him. He pulls out his small black bible. He opens it, swiping through to an ear marked page, and reads aloud.

### HENRY

(Daniel 4:35) All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him..

He looks around at the wounded, gripping the book tighter and tighter as the groans of the wounded soldiers continue.

HENRY (CONT'D) What have you done?

INT. GERMAN MEDICAL TENT - NIGHT

Adi sits in a chair, his hands shaking on top of his knees. He struggles to catch his breath.

Otto enters the tent.

# OTTO

Adi?

Adi looks up. Fuchsl comes racing over, his tail wagging as he jumps up to his lost friend.

Otto sits next to him and places his hand on Adi's shoulder.

OTTO (CONT'D) We're okay. We got through it.

Adi sits still in shock, his eyes nearly lifeless, looking forward.

ADI That man came so near to killing me. I thought I should never see Germany again. It's as if..

Adi's eyes swell with tears.

OTTO As if what?

ADI It's as if.. A divine providence saved me from his devilish fire.

OTTO You're okay now. It's over. Otto says patting him on the back.

Another GERMAN SOLDIER enters their tent.

GERMAN SOLDIER Lance Corporal Hitler.

ADOLF, known as Adi, stands up.

GERMAN SOLDIER (CONT'D) Colonel Pommel wants to see you.

Adi nods his head and walks over to the solider and then out of the tent, the loyal Fuchsl following close behind.

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END