

'Forget Me Not' by Katelyn Amor

Will they remember me?

It's the overpowering question that consumes his consciousness, his eyes boring into the grim trench wall with an absent stare. He isn't quite sure he's actually *there* - rubbing aching shoulders with his friends - waiting for the signal. But even standing here, weighed down to Earth's core in his dampened boots, he might as well be floating.

Perhaps he knows this might be it. His frozen fingers, cracking at the knuckles with slits of scarlet, tremble around the musket in his hands. He doesn't know how to use this thing. *Not really*. All in the name of the war effort, he supposes.

But what is it all for in the end? It had been years... *so* many years. What had begun as a spark of patriotism had burned down only to a weak candlelight, swayed by even the lightest breeze.

He thinks of his mother, his siblings. He tries to be there at home instead - cocooned in the humble warmth of his squeaky old bed at home, dappled sunlight dancing in gold on the wooden floorboards through his window. He tries to imagine himself filled to the belly with one of her homemade dishes, and not here a malnourished skeleton of who he was. He can almost see the emerald green blades of grass, embellished with morning dew... *grass*. He can't remember the last time he saw grass as green as that. Nowadays, he can only find it in dull, dead clumps drowning in translucent puddles.

God, how he misses it. How he misses *them*. And it makes him wonder...

Will they forget me?

When this is all over, will he just become part of the woodwork, fading into obscurity? Another name, another poor lad shipped back home - or worse, chucked into whatever pit they can dig. He doesn't want to stay in this god-awful place.

A low hum of activity breaks out amongst the boys, and he forces himself out of his perturbed paralysis. His gaze creeps up as far over the top of the trench as he can, in some effort to will himself to make that jump when needed. Cautiously, his hand reaches for his helmet, patting it with a small *clang*. Still there. Not much left to do now but wait.

The whistle sounds.

In the blind clamber above the trenches, his mind plummets into a frenzy. A cacophony of gunfire and strained cries fills the air in the desperate charge over the wasteland above; along the mass of barbed wire and craters in the ground, he hurtles as fast as his legs will take him. He fumbles for his musket as he tries to aim it for a shot. Men drop like flies, left, right and centre, and he just keeps running, running, running, *don't stop running-*

The ground gives way beneath him and he gasps, clawing helplessly at the sides with dirt evacuating underneath his fingernails. The pungent stench of death hits him, his eyes and nose streaming. He can't even look at the body - that and the incessant buzzing of flies behind him is enough. He scrambles for the sides of the crater, trying not to slip into the mud. At least he's one of the taller lads...

"Look how big you're getting!" His mother pulls the strip of measuring tape away from the wall with a flourish, her eyes twinkling with adoration. "Before long you'll be as tall as me."

She runs a hand over his hair, giving it a playful ruffle as he beams with pride. He can't wait to grow up someday.

Shattered, he digs his fingers into the earth above, using it to hoist his weight up onto the ledge. Young men continue to charge and drop around him as he pulls his feet up and over. With shattered triumph, he gets back up onto his feet and manages a few frenetic bounds towards enemy lines-

BANG!

The shot rings through his body, rattling his skull and his body writhing with the sudden shot of pain. He inhales sharply. His fingertips delicately stroke his heart - now punctured and leaking with life in a steady trickle of crimson. Gravity winning, he falls like dead weight back into the crater, joining his friend. And as his vision swims, his being becoming lighter and the gunfire being drowned out, he begs for one thing:

Don't forget me...

Years pass. With time, reconciliation, followed by more destruction and more reconciliation, the grass begins to grow green once more. The earth cradles his fragile remains and blankets them in soil. Atop his bed grows a dainty cluster of

cornflowers, reaching up and stretching with deep blue dashes of hope painted upon their petals. The heavens breathe a sigh of relief, sweeping through the ever growing grass rising up from the ashes. Nature keeps him there, safe and sound, until he is found one day...

The sky is illuminated in a cloudless, forget-me-not blue when I finally find you. It's bigger than in the pictures - dozens of crosses, row upon row for as far as the horizons go, each printed with a name or two.

As far as cemeteries go, it's peaceful here. Rolling hills of prosperous farmland surround where you lie now, and the air is rich with the lively harmonies of birds chirping. I like to think you're quite at home here.

Eventually I found your name. Even with years of wear and tear, the stone has not worn down enough to obscure those letters, etched beautifully as they catch a ray of sunlight. It casts a shadow on the soil below, where sprigs of wildflowers are waiting to bloom around you. I trace my fingertips along every letter, surprised to find its warmth to the touch.

All of those years... *so many years*. You were so much more than that framed photograph on my grandmother's mantelpiece; more than the solemn-looking boy dressed head to toe in uniform who, when I asked, was labelled nothing more as "*someone from long ago*" with pain in her eyes. You deserved better than that.

So here I find myself, standing in the Somme with only a name and some research I salvaged through some spot of luck. I try to envisage what it was like when you were here. It's impossible to conjure an image of this beautiful hope of an afterlife as a barren wasteland, the depths of hell fenced off with barbed wire. All of that, just to end up as a nameless face on my grandmother's mantelpiece.

But don't you worry...

We haven't forgotten you.