

An imagined letter to an English World War I soldier

You don't know me yet, but I have things to tell you. You're about to go back to the war front in France, and I'm sorry to say it's going to be worse than ever this time. You're going to be wounded, I'm afraid. Very badly. But you'll survive. You'll make it back home to England. You have to, you see. Forty years from now you'll become my grandfather.

Not that home will be a bed of roses. Wages will be down, and three men will fight for every job. At times you'll be cold, and at times you'll be hungry. And if you say anything, the police will come after you.

And then it will get worse. There are some lean years coming. And I'm sorry, but along the way you'll realise; the war didn't end. It was just a lull. You'll have to do it all again. This time your son will have to go, not you. You don't know him yet, but you will. But don't worry. He'll get back too. He has to. You're my grandfather, remember?

And I'll be born in a different world. There will be jobs for everyone. They'll be building houses. You'll go to the doctor whenever you want. I'll go to school. I'll get free orange juice. You'll get free walking sticks. But most of all we'll get peace. Finally, year after year. I will never go to war, you know. I will never have to. The first time I go to France will be a trip with my school.

So go back now, and play your tiny part in the great drama, and sustain yourself by knowing: it comes out well in the end. I promise.

Your granddaughter / Your grandson.