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A JOURNAL OF IMPRESSIONS IN BELGIUM

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Dedication

(*To a Field Ambulance in Flanders*)

I do not call you comrades,

You,

Who did what I only dreamed.

Though you have taken my dream,

And dressed yourselves in its beauty and its glory,

Your faces are turned aside as you pass by.

I am nothing to you,

For I have done no more than dream.

Your faces are like the face of her whom you follow,

Danger,

The Beloved who looks backward as she runs, calling to her lovers,

The Huntress who flies before her quarry, trailing her lure.

She called to me from her battle–places,

She flung before me the curved lightning of her shells for a lure;

And when I came within sight of her,

She turned aside,

And hid her face from me.

But you she loved; You she touched with her hand; For you the white flames of her feet stayed in their running; She kept you with her in her fields of Flanders, Where you go, Gathering your wounded from among her dead. Grey night falls on your going and black night on your returning. You go Under the thunder of the guns, the shrapnel's rain and the curved lightning of the shells, And where the high towers are broken, And houses crack like the staves of a thin crate filled with fire; Into the mixing smoke and dust of roof and walls torn asunder You go; And only my dream follows you.

That is why I do not speak of you,

Calling you by your names.

Your names are strung with the names of ruined and immortal cities,

Termonde and Antwerp, Dixmude and Ypres and Furnes,

Like jewels on one chain—

Thus,

In the high places of Heaven,

They shall tell all your names.

MAY SINCLAIR.

March 8th, 1915.

Introduction

This is a “Journal of Impressions,” and it is nothing more. It will not satisfy people who want accurate and substantial information about Belgium, or about the War, or about Field Ambulances and Hospital Work, and do not want to see any of these things “across a temperament.” For the Solid Facts and the Great Events they must go to such books as Mr. E. A. Powell’s “Fighting in Flanders,” or Mr. Frank Fox’s “The Agony of Belgium,” or Dr. H. S. Souttar’s “A Surgeon in Belgium,” or “A Woman’s Experiences in the Great War,” by Louise Mack.

For many of these impressions I can claim only a psychological accuracy; some were insubstantial to the last degree, and very few were actually set down there and then, on the spot, as I have set them down here. This is only a Journal in so far as it is a record of days, as faithful as I could make it in every detail, and as direct as circumstances allowed. But circumstances seldom *did* allow, and I was always behindhand with my Journal—a week behind with the first day of the seventeen, four months behind with the last.

This was inevitable. For in the last week of the Siege of Antwerp, when the wounded were being brought into Ghent by hundreds, and when the fighting came closer and closer to the city, and at the end, when the Germans were driving you from Ghent to Bruges, and from Bruges to Ostend and from Ostend to Dunkirk, you could not sit down to write your impressions, even if you were cold–blooded enough to want to. It was as much as you could do to scribble the merest note of what happened in your Day–Book.

But when you had made fast each day with its note, your impressions were safe, far safer than if you had tried to record them in their flux as they came. However far behind I might be with my Journal, it was *kept*. It is not written “up,” or round and about the original notes in my Day–Book, it is simply written *out*. Each day of the seventeen had its own quality and was soaked in its own atmosphere; each had its own unique and incorruptible memory, and the slight lapse of time, so far from dulling or blurring that memory, crystallized it and made it sharp and clean. And in writing *out*I have been careful never to go behind or beyond the day, never to add anything, but to leave each moment as it was. I have set down the day’s imperfect or absurd impression, in all its imperfection or absurdity, and the day’s crude emotion in all its crudity, rather than taint its reality with the discreet reflections that came after.

I make no apology for my many errors—where they were discoverable I have corrected them in a footnote; to this day I do not know how wildly wrong I may have been about kilometres and the points of the compass, and the positions of batteries and the movements of armies; but there were other things of which I was dead sure; and this record has at least the value of a “human document.”

* * * * *

There is one question that I may be asked: “Why, when you had the luck to go out with a Field Ambulance Corps distinguished by its gallantry—why in heaven’s name have you not told the story of its heroism?”

Well—I have not told it for several excellent reasons. When I set out to keep a Journal I pledged myself to set down only what I had seen or felt, and to avoid as far as possible the second–hand; and it was my misfortune that I saw very little of the field–work of the Corps. Besides, the Corps itself was then in its infancy, and it is its infancy—its irrepressible, half–

irresponsible, whole engaging infancy—that I have touched here. After those seventeen days at Ghent it grew up in all conscience. It was at Furnes and Dixmude and La Panne, after I had left it, that its most memorable deeds were done.[1]

And this story of the Corps is not mine to tell. Part of it has been told already by Dr. Souttar, and part by Mr. Philip Gibbs, and others. The rest is yet to come.

M. S.

July 15th, 1915.

[1] See Postscript.

September 25th, 1914

After the painful births and deaths of I don't know how many committees, after six weeks' struggling with something we imagined to be Red Tape, which proved to be the combined egoism of several persons all desperately anxious to "get to the Front," and desperately afraid of somebody else getting there too, and getting there first, we are actually off. Impossible to describe the mysterious processes by which we managed it. I think the War Office kicked us out twice, and the Admiralty once, though what we were doing with the Admiralty I don't to this day understand. The British Red Cross kicked us steadily all the time, on general principles; the American snubbed us rather badly; what the French said to us I don't remember, and I can't think that we carried persistency so far as to apply to the Russian and the Japanese. Many of our scheme perished in their own vagueness. Others, vivid and adventurous, were checked by the first encounter with the crass reality. At one time, I remember, we were to have sent out a detachment of stalwart Amazons in khaki breeches who were to dash out on to the battle–field, reconnoitre, and pick up the wounded and carry them away slung over their saddles. The only difficulty was to get the horses. But the author of the scheme—who had bought her breeches—had allowed for that. The horses were to be caught on the battle–field; as the wounded and dead dropped from their saddles the Amazons were to leap into them and ride off. On this system "remounts" were also to be supplied. Whenever a horse was shot dead under its rider, an Amazon was to dash up with another whose rider had been shot dead. It was all perfectly simple and only needed a little "organization." For four weeks the lure of the battle–field kept our volunteers dancing round the War Office and the Red Cross Societies, and for four weeks their progress to the Front was frustrated by Lord Kitchener. Some dropped off disheartened, but others came on, and a regenerated committee dealt with them. Finally the thing crystallized into a Motor Ambulance Corps. An awful sanity came over the committee, chastened by its sufferings, and the volunteers, under pressure, definitely renounced the battle–field. Then somebody said, "Let's help the Belgian refugees." From that moment our course was clear. Everybody was perfectly willing that we should help the refugees, provided we relinquished all claim on the wounded. The Belgian Legation was enchanted. It gave passports to a small private commission of inquiry under our Commandant to go out to Belgium and send in a report. At Ostend the commission of inquiry whittled itself down to the one energetic person who had taken it out. And before we knew where we were our Ambulance Corps was accepted by the Belgian Red Cross.

Only we had not got the ambulances.

And though we had got some money, we had not got enough. This was really our good luck, for it saved us from buying the wrong kind of motor ambulance car. But at first the blow staggered us. Then, by some abrupt, incalculable turn of destiny, the British Red Cross, which had kicked us so persistently, came to our help and gave us all the ambulances we wanted.

And we are off.

There are thirteen of us: The Commandant, and Dr. Haynes and Dr. Bird under him; and Mrs. Torrence, a trained nurse and midwife, who can drive a motor car through anything, and take it to bits and put it together again; Janet McNeil, also an expert motorist, and Ursula Dearmer and Mrs. Lambert, Red Cross emergency nurses; Mr. Grierson, Mr. Foster and Mr. Riley, stretcher–bearers, and two chauffeurs and me. I don't know where I come in. But they've

called me the Secretary and Reporter, which sounds very fine, and I am to keep the accounts (Heaven help them!) and write the Commandant's reports, and toss off articles for the daily papers, to make a little money for the Corps. We've got some already, raised by the Commandant's Report and Appeal that we published in the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Chronicle*. I shall never forget how I sprinted down Fleet Street to get it in in time, four days before we started.

And we have landed at Ostend.

I'll confess now that I dreaded Ostend more than anything. We had been told that there were horrors upon horrors in Ostend. Children were being born in the streets, and the state of the bathing–machines where the refugees lived was unspeakable. I imagined the streets of Ostend crowded with refugee women bearing children, and the Digue covered with the horrific bathing–machines. On the other hand, Ostend was said to be the safest spot in Europe. No Germans there. No Zeppelins. No bombs.

And we found the bathing–machines planted out several miles from the town, almost invisible specks on a vanishing shore–line. The refugees we met walking about the streets of Ostend were in fairly good case and bore themselves bravely. But the town had been bombarded the night before and our hotel had been the object of very special attentions. We chose it (the "Terminus") because it lay close to the landing–stage and saved us the trouble of going into the town to look for quarters. It was under the same roof as the railway station, where we proposed to leave our ambulance cars and heavy luggage. And we had no difficulty whatever in getting rooms for the whole thirteen of us. There was no sort of competition for rooms in that hotel. I said to myself, "If Ostend ever is bombarded, this railway station will be the first to suffer. And the hotel and the railway station are one." And when I was shown into a bedroom with glass windows all along its inner wall and a fine glass front looking out on to the platforms under the immense glass roof of the station, I said, "If this hotel is ever bombarded, what fun it will be for the person who sleeps in this bed between these glass windows."

We were all rather tired and hungry as we met for dinner at seven o'clock. And when we were told that all lights would be put out in the town at eight–thirty we only thought that a municipality which was receiving all the refugees in Belgium must practise *some* economy, and that, anyway, an hour and a half was enough for anybody to dine in; and we hoped that the Commandant, who had gone to call on the English chaplain at the Grand Hôtel Littoral, would find his way back again to the peaceful and commodious shelter of the "Terminus."

He did find his way back, at seven–thirty, just in time to give us a chance of clearing out, if we chose to take it. The English chaplain, it seemed, was surprised and dismayed at our idea of a suitable hotel, and he implored us to fly, instantly, before a bomb burst in among us (this was the first we had heard of the bombardment of the night before). The Commandant put it to us as we sat there: Whether would we leave that dining–room at once and pack our baggage all over again, and bundle out, and go hunting for rooms all through Ostend with the lights out, and perhaps fall into the harbour; or stay where we were and risk the off–chance of a bomb? And we were all very tired and hungry, and we had only got to the soup, and we had seen (and smelt) the harbour, so we said we'd stay where we were and risk it.

And we stayed. A Taube hovered over us and never dropped its bomb.

Saturday, 26th

When we compared notes the next morning we found that we had all gone soundly to sleep, too tired to take the Taube seriously, all except our two chauffeurs, who were downright annoyed because no bomb had entered their bedroom. Then we all went out and looked at the little hole in the roof of the fish market, and the big hole in the hotel garden, and thought of bombs as curious natural phenomena that never had and never would have any intimate connection with *us*.

And for five weeks, ever since I knew that I must certainly go out with this expedition, I had been living in black funk; in shameful and appalling terror. Every night before I went to sleep I saw an interminable spectacle of horrors: trunks without heads, heads without trunks, limbs tangled in intestines, corpses by every roadside, murders, mutilations, my friends shot dead before my eyes. Nothing I shall ever see will be more ghastly than the things I have seen. And yet, before a possibly–to–be–bombarded Ostend this strange visualizing process ceases, and I see nothing and feel nothing. Absolutely nothing; until suddenly the Commandant announces that he is going into the town, by himself, to *buy a hat*, and I get my first experience of real terror.

For the hats that the Commandant buys when he is by himself—there are no words for them.

This morning the Corps begins to realize its need of discipline. First of all, our chauffeurs have disappeared and can nowhere be found. The motor ambulances languish in inactivity on Cockerill's Wharf. We find one chauffeur and set him to keep guard over a tin of petrol. We *know* the ambulances can't start till heaven knows when, and so, first Mrs. Lambert, our emergency nurse, then, I regret to say, our Secretary and Reporter make off and sneak into the Cathedral. We are only ten minutes, but still we are away, and Mrs. Torrence, our trained nurse, is ready for us when we come back. We are accused bitterly of sight–seeing. (We had betrayed the inherent levity of our nature the day before, on the boat, when we looked at the sunset.) Then the Secretary and Reporter, utterly intractable, wanders forth ostensibly to look for the Commandant, who has disappeared, but really to get a sight of the motor ambulances on Cockerill's Wharf. And Mrs. Torrence is ready again for the Secretary, convicted now of sight–seeing. And I have seen no Commandant, and no motor ambulances and no wharf. (Unbearable thought, that I may never, absolutely never, see Cockerill's Wharf!) It is really awful this time, because the President of the Belgian Red Cross is waiting to get the thirteen of us to the Town Hall to have our passports *visés*. And the Commandant is rounding up his Corps, and Ursula Dearmer is heaven knows where, and Mrs. Lambert only somewhere in the middle distance, and Mrs. Torrence's beautiful eyes are blazing at the slip–sloppiness of it all. Things were very different at the — Hospital, where she was trained.

Only the President remains imperturbable.

For, after all this fuming and fretting, the President isn't quite ready himself, or perhaps the Town Hall isn't ready, and we all stroll about the streets of Ostend for half an hour. And the Commandant goes off by himself, to buy that hat.

It is a terrible half–hour. But after all, he comes back without it, judging it better to bear the ills he has.

Very leisurely, and with an immense consumption of time, we stroll and get photographed for our passports. Then on to the Town Hall, and then to the Military Depôt for our *Laissez–passer*, and then to the Hôtel Terminus for lunch. And at one–thirty we are off.

Whatever happens, whatever we see and suffer, nothing can take from us that run from Ostend to Ghent.

We go along a straight, flat highway of grey stones, through flat, green fields and between thin lines of trees—tall and slender and delicate trees. There are no hedges. Only here and there a row of poplars or pollard willows is flung out as a screen against the open sky. This country is formed for the very expression of peace. The straight flat roads, the straight flat fields and straight tall trees stand still in an immense quiet and serenity. We pass low Flemish houses with white walls and red roofs. Their green doors and shutters are tall and slender like the trees, the colours vivid as if the paint had been laid on yesterday. It is all unspeakably beautiful and it comes to me with the natural, inevitable shock and ecstasy of beauty. I am going straight into the horror of war. For all I know it may be anywhere, here, behind this sentry; or there, beyond that line of willows. I don't know. I don't care. I cannot realize it. All that I can see or feel at the moment is this beauty. I look and look, so that I may remember it.

Is it possible that I am enjoying myself?

I dare not tell Mrs. Torrence. I dare not tell any of the others. They seem to me inspired with an austere sense of duty, a terrible integrity. They know what they are here for. To me it is incredible that I should be here.

I am in Car 1., sitting beside Tom, the chauffeur; Mrs. Torrence is on the other side of me. Tom disapproves of these Flemish roads. He cannot see that they are beautiful. They will play the devil with his tyres.

I am reminded unpleasantly that our Daimler is not a touring car but a motor ambulance and that these roads will jolt the wounded most abominably.

There are straggling troops on the road now. At the nearest village all the inhabitants turn out to cheer us. They cry out "*Les Anglais!*" and laugh for joy. Perhaps they think that if the British Red Cross has come the British Army can't be far behind. But when they hear that we are Belgian Red Cross they are gladder than ever. They press round us. It is wonderful to them that we should have come all the way from England "*pour les Belges!*" Somehow the beauty of the landscape dies before these crowding, pressing faces.

We pass through Bruges without seeing it. I have no recollection whatever of having seen the Belfry. We see nothing but the Canal (where we halt to take in petrol) and more villages, more faces. And more troops.

Half–way between Bruges and Ghent an embankment thrown up on each side of the road tells of possible patrols and casual shooting. It is the first visible intimation that the enemy may be anywhere.

A curious excitement comes to you. I suppose it is excitement, though it doesn't feel like it. You have been drunk, very slightly drunk with the speed of the car. But now you are sober. Your heart beats quietly, steadily, but with a little creeping, mounting thrill in the beat. The sensation is distinctly pleasurable. You say to yourself, "It is coming. Now—or the next minute—perhaps at the end of the road." You have one moment of regret. "After all, it would be a pity if it came too soon, before we'd even begun our job." But the thrill, mounting steadily, overtakes the regret. It is only a little thrill, so far (for you don't really believe that there is any danger), but you can imagine the thing growing, growing steadily, till it becomes ecstasy. Not that you imagine anything at the moment. At the moment you are no longer an observing, reflecting being; you have ceased to be aware of yourself; you exist only in that quiet, steady thrill that is so unlike any excitement that you have ever known. Presently you

get used to it. “What a fool I should have been if I hadn’t come. I wouldn’t have missed this run for the world.”

I forget myself so far as to say this to Mrs. Torrence. My voice doesn’t sound at all like the stern voice of duty. It is the voice of somebody enjoying herself. I am behaving exactly as I behaved this morning at Ostend; and cannot possibly hope for any sympathy from Mrs. Torrence.

But Mrs. Torrence has unbent a little. She has in fact been unbending gradually ever since we left Ostend. There is a softer light in her beautiful eyes. For she is not only a trained nurse but an expert motorist; and a Daimler is a Daimler even when it’s an ambulance car. From time to time remarks of a severely technical nature are exchanged between her and Tom. Still, up till now, nothing has passed to indicate any flagging in the relentless spirit of the — Hospital.

The next minute I hear that the desire of Mrs. Torrence’s heart is to get into the greatest possible danger—and to get out of it.

The greatest possible danger is to fall into the hands of the Uhlans. I feel that I should be very glad indeed to get out of it, but that I’m not by any means so keen on getting in. I say so. I confess frankly that I’m afraid of Uhlans, particularly when they’re drunk.

But Mrs. Torrence is not afraid of anything. There is no German living, drunk or sober, who could break her spirit. Nothing dims for her that shining vision of the greatest possible danger. She does not know what fear is.

I conceive an adoration for Mrs. Torrence, and a corresponding distaste for myself. For I do know what fear is. And in spite of the little steadily–mounting thrill, I remember distinctly those five weeks of frightful anticipation when I knew that I must go out to the War; the going to bed, night after night, drugged with horror, black horror that creeps like poison through your nerves; the falling asleep and forgetting it; the waking, morning after morning, with an energetic and lucid brain that throws out a dozen war pictures to the minute like a ghastly cinema show, till horror becomes terror; the hunger for breakfast; the queer, almost uncanny revival of courage that follows its satisfaction; the driving will that strengthens as the day goes on and slackens its hold at evening. I remember one evening very near the end; the Sunday evening when the Commandant dropped in, after he had come back from Belgium. We were stirring soup over the gas stove in the scullery—you couldn’t imagine a more peaceful scene—when he said, “They are bringing up the heavy siege guns from Namur, and there is going to be a terrific bombardment of Antwerp, and I think it will be very interesting for you to see it.” I remember replying with passionate sincerity that I would rather die than see it; that if I could nurse the wounded I would face any bombardment you please to name; but to go and look on and make copy out of the sufferings I cannot help—I couldn’t and I wouldn’t, and that was flat. And I wasn’t a journalist any more than I was a trained nurse.

I can still see the form of the Commandant rising up on the other side of the scullery stove, and in his pained, uncomprehending gaze and in the words he utters I imagine a challenge. It is as if he said, “Of course, if you’re *afraid*”—(haven’t I told him that I *am* afraid?).

The gage is thrown down on the scullery floor. I pick it up. And that is why I am here on this singular adventure.

Thus, for the next three kilometres, I meditate on my cowardice. It is all over as if it had never been, but how can I tell that it won’t come back again? I can only hope that when the Uhlans appear I shall behave decently. And this place that we have come to is Ecloo. We are not very far from Ghent.

A church spire, a few roofs rising above trees. Then many roofs all together. Then the beautiful grey–white foreign city.

As we run through the streets we are followed by cyclists; cyclists issue from every side–street and pour into our road; cyclists rise up out of the ground to follow us. We don't realize all at once that it is the ambulance they are following. Bowing low like racers over their handle–bars, they shoot past us; they slacken pace and keep alongside, they shoot ahead; the cyclists are most fearfully excited. It dawns on us that they are escorting us; that they are racing each other; that they are bringing the news of our arrival to the town. They behave as if we were the vanguard of the British Army.

We pass the old Military Hospital—*Hôpital Militaire* No. I.—and presently arrive at the Flandria Palace Hotel, which is *Hôpital Militaire* No. II. The cyclists wheel off, scatter and disappear. The crowd in the Place gathers round the porch of the hotel to look at the English Ambulance.

We enter. We are received by various officials and presented to Madame F., the head of the Red Cross nursing staff. There is some confusion, and Mrs. Torrence finds herself introduced as the Secretary of the English Committee. Successfully concealed behind the broadest back in the Corps, which belongs to Mr. Grierson, I have time to realize how funny we all are. Everybody in the hospital is in uniform, of course. The nurses of the Belgian Red Cross wear white linen overalls with the brassard on one sleeve, and the Red Cross on the breasts of their overalls, and over their foreheads on the front of their white linen veils. The men wear military or semi–military uniforms. We had never agreed as to our uniform, and some of us had had no time to get it, if we had agreed. Assembled in the vestibule, we look more like a party of refugees, or the cast of a Barrie play, than a field ambulance corps. Mr. Grierson, the Chaplain, alone wears complete khaki, in which he is indistinguishable from any Tommy. The Commandant, obeying some mysterious inspiration, has left his khaki suit behind. He wears a Norfolk jacket and one of his hats. Mr. Foster in plain clothes, with a satchel slung over his shoulders, has the air of an inquiring tourist. Mrs. Torrence and Janet McNeil in short khaki tunics, khaki putties, and round Jaeger caps, and very thick coats over all, strapped in with leather belts, look as if they were about to sail on an Arctic expedition; I was told to wear dark blue serge, and I wear it accordingly; Ursula Dearmer and Mrs. Lambert are in normal clothes. But the amiable officials and the angelic Belgian ladies behave as if there was nothing in the least odd about our appearance. They remember only that we are English and that it is now six o'clock and that we have had no tea. They conceive this to be the most deplorable fate that can overtake the English, and they hurry us into the great kitchen to a round table, loaded with cake and bread–and–butter and enormous bowls of tea. The angelic beings in white veils wait on us. We are hungry and we think (a pardonable error) that this meal is hospital supper; after which some work will surely be found for us to do.

We are shown to our quarters on the third floor. We expect two bare dormitories with rows of hard beds, which we are prepared to make ourselves, besides sweeping the dormitories, and we find a fine suite of rooms—a mess–room, bedrooms, dressing–rooms, bathrooms—and hospital orderlies for our *valets de chambre*.

We unpack, sit round the mess–room and wait for orders. Perhaps we may all be sent down into the kitchen to wash up. Personally, I hope we shall be, for washing up is a thing I can do both quickly and well. It is now seven o'clock.

At half–past we are sent down into the kitchen, not to wash up, but, if you will believe it, to dine. And more hospital orderlies wait on us at dinner.

The desire of our hearts is to do *something*, if it is only to black the boots of the angelic beings. But no, there is nothing for us to do. To–morrow, perhaps, the doctors and stretcher–bearers will be busy. We hear that only five wounded have been brought into the hospital to–day. They have no ambulance cars, and ours will be badly needed—to–morrow. But to–night, no.

We go out into the town, to the Hôtel de la Poste, and sit outside the café and drink black coffee in despair. We find our chauffeurs doing the same thing. Then we go back to our sumptuous hotel and so, dejectedly, to bed. Aeroplanes hover above us all night.

Sunday, 27th

We hang about waiting for orders. They may come at any moment. Meanwhile this place grows incredible and fantastic. Now it is an hotel and now it is a military hospital; its two aspects shift and merge into each other with a dream–like effect. It is a huge building of extravagant design, wearing its turrets, its balconies, its very roofs, like so much decoration. The gilded legend, "Flandria Palace Hotel," glitters across the immense white façade. But the Red Cross flag flies from the front and from the corners of the turrets and from the balconies of the long flank facing south. You arrive under a fan–like porch that covers the smooth slope of the approach. You enter your hotel through mahogany revolving doors. A colossal Flora stands by the lift at the foot of the big staircase. Unaware that this is no festival of flowers, the poor stupid thing leans forward, smiling, and holds out her garland to the wounded as they are carried past. Nobody takes any notice of her. The great hall of the hotel has been stripped bare. All draperies and ornaments have disappeared. The proprietor has disappeared, or goes about disguised as a Red Cross officer. The grey mosaic of floors and stairs is cleared of rugs and carpeting; the reading–room is now a secretarial bureau; the billiard–room is an operating theatre; the great dining–hall and the reception–rooms and the bedrooms are wards. The army of waiters and valets and chambermaids has gone, and everywhere there are surgeons, ambulance men, hospital orderlies and the Belgian nurses with their white overalls and red crosses. And in every corridor and on every staircase and in every room there is a mixed odour, bitter and sweet and penetrating, of antiseptics and of ether. When the ambulance cars come up from the railway stations and the battle–fields, the last inappropriate detail, the mahogany revolving doors, will disappear, so that the wounded may be carried through on their stretchers.

I confess to a slight, persistent fear of *seeing* these wounded whom I cannot help. It is not very active, it has left off visualizing the horror of bloody bandages and mangled bodies. But it's there; it waits for me in every corridor and at the turn of every stair, and it makes me loathe myself.

We have news this morning of a battle at Alost, a town about fifteen kilometres south–east of Ghent. The Belgians are moving forty thousand men from Antwerp towards Ghent, and heavy fighting is expected near the town. If we are not in the thick of it, we are on the edge of the thick.

They have just told us an awful thing. Two wounded men were left lying out on the battle–field all night after yesterday's fighting. The military ambulances did not fetch them. Our ambulance was not sent out. There are all sorts of formalities to be observed before it can go. We haven't got our military passes yet. And our English Red Cross brassards are no use. We must have Belgian ones stamped with the Government stamp. And these things take time.

Meanwhile we, who have still the appearance of a disorganized Cook's tourist party, are beginning to realize each other, the first step to realizing ourselves. We have come from heaven knows where to live together here heaven knows for how long. The Commandant and I are friends; Mrs. Torrence and Janet McNeil are friends; Dr. Haynes and Dr. Bird are evidently friends; our chauffeurs, Bert and Tom, are bound to fraternize professionally; we and they are all right; but these pairs were only known to each other a week or two ago, and some of the thirteen never met at all till yesterday. An unknown fourteenth is coming to–day. We are five women and nine men. You might wonder how, for all social purposes, we are to sort ourselves? But the idea, sternly emphasized by Mrs. Torrence, is that we have no social

purposes. We are neither more nor less than a strictly official and absolutely impersonal body, held together, not by the ordinary affinities of men and women, but by a common devotion and a common aim. Differences, if any should exist, will be sunk in the interest of the community. Probabilities that rule all human intercourse, as we have hitherto known it, will be temporarily suspended in our case. But we shall gain more than we lose. Insignificant as individuals, as a corps we share the honour and prestige of the Military Authority under which we work. We have visions of a relentless discipline commanding and controlling us. A cold glory hovers over the Commandant as the vehicle of this transcendent power.

When the Power has its way with us it will take no count of friendships or affinities. It will set precedence at naught. It will say to itself, "Here are two field ambulance cars and fourteen people. Five out of these fourteen are women, and what the devil are they doing in a field ambulance?" And it will appoint two surgeons, who will also serve as stretcher–bearers, to each car; it will set our trained nurse, Mrs. Torrence, in command of the untrained nurses in one of the wards of the Military Hospital No. II.; the Hospital itself will find suitable feminine tasks for Ursula Dearmer and Mrs. Lambert; while Janet McNeil and the Secretary will be told off to work among the refugees. And until more stretcher–bearers are wanted the rest of us will be nowhere. If nothing can be found for our women in the Hospital they will be sent home.

It seems inconceivable that the Power, if it is anything like Lord Kitchener, can decide otherwise.

Odd how the War changes us. I, who abhor and resist authority, who hardly know how I am to bring myself to obey my friend the Commandant, am enamoured of this Power and utterly submissive. I realize with something like a thrill that we are in a military hospital under military orders; and that my irrelevant former self, with all that it has desired or done, must henceforth cease (perhaps irrevocably) to exist. I contemplate its extinction with equanimity. I remember that one of my brothers was a Captain in the Gunners, that another of them fought as a volunteer in the first Boer War; that my uncle, Captain Hind, of the Bengal Fusiliers, fought in the Mutiny and in the Crimean War, and his son at Chitral, and that I have one nephew in Kitchener's Army and one in the West Lancashire Hussars; and that three generations of solid sugar–planters and ship–owners cannot separate me from my forefathers, who seem to have been fighting all the time. (At the moment I have forgotten my five weeks' blue funk.)

Mrs. Torrence's desire for discipline is not more sincere than mine. Meanwhile the hand that is to lick us into shape hovers over us and does not fall. We wait expectantly in the mess–room which is to contain us.

It was once the sitting–room of a fine suite. A diminutive vestibule divides it from the corridor. You enter through double doors with muffed glass panes in a wooden partition opposite the wide French windows opening on the balcony. A pale blond light from the south fills the room. Its walls are bare except for a map of Belgium, faced by a print from one of the illustrated papers representing the King and Queen of the Belgians. Of its original furnishings only a few cane chairs and a settee remain. These are set back round the walls and in the window. Long tables with marble tops, brought up from what was once the hotel restaurant, enclose three sides of a hollow square.

Round these we group ourselves thus: the Commandant in the middle of the top table in the window, between Mrs. Torrence and Ursula Dearmer; Dr. Haynes and Dr. Bird, on the other side of Ursula Dearmer; the chauffeurs, Tom and Bert, round the corner at the right–hand side table; I am round the other corner at the left–hand side table, by Mrs. Torrence, and Janet

McNeil is on my right, and on hers are Mrs. Lambert and Mr. Foster and the Chaplain. Mr. Riley sits alone on the inside opposite Mrs. Torrence.

This rather quiet and very serious person interests me. He doesn't say anything, and you wonder what sort of consciousness goes on under the close–cropped, boyish, black velvet hair. Nature has left his features a bit unfinished, the further to baffle you.

All these people are interesting, intensely interesting and baffling, as men and women are bound to be who have come from heaven knows where to face heaven knows what. Most of them are quite innocently unaware. They do not know that they are interesting, or baffling either. They do not know, and it has not occurred to them to wonder, how they are going to affect each other or how they are going to behave. Nobody, you would say, is going to affect the Commandant. When he is not dashing up and down, driven by his mysterious energy, he stands apart in remote and dreamy isolation. His eyes, when they are not darting brilliantly in pursuit of the person or the thing he needs, stand apart too in a blank, blue purity, undarkened by any perception of the details that may accumulate under his innocent nose. He has called this corps into being, gathered these strange men and women up with a sweep of his wing and swept them almost violently together. He doesn't know how any of us are going to behave. He has taken for granted, with his naïve and heart–rending trust in the beauty of human nature, that we are all going to behave beautifully. He is absorbed in his scheme. Each one of us fits into it at some point, and if there is anything in us left over it is not, at the moment, his concern.

Yet he himself has margins about him and a mysterious hinterland not to be confined or accounted for by any scheme. He alone of us has the air, buoyant, restless, and a little vague, of being in for some tremendous but wholly visionary adventure.

When I look at him I wonder again what this particular adventure is going to do to him, and whether he has, even now, any vivid sense of the things that are about to happen. I remember that evening in my scullery, and how he talked about the German siege–guns as if they were details in some unreal scene, the most interesting part, say, of a successful cinematograph show.

But they are really bringing up those siege–guns from Namur.

And the Commandant has brought four women with him besides me. I confess I was appalled when I first knew that they would be brought.

Mrs. Torrence, perhaps—for she is in love with danger,[2] and she is of the kind whom no power, military or otherwise, can keep back from their desired destiny.

But why little Janet McNeil?[3] She is the youngest of us, an eighteen–year–old child who has followed Mrs. Torrence, and will follow her if she walks straight into the German trenches. She sits beside me on my right, ready for anything, all her delicate Highland beauty bundled up in the kit of a little Arctic explorer, utterly determined, utterly impassive. Her small face, under the woolly cap that defies the North Pole, is nearly always grave; but it has a sudden smile that is adorable.

And the youngest but one, Ursula Dearmer, who can't be so much older—Mr. Riley's gloom and the Commandant's hinterland are nothing to the mystery of this young girl. She looks as if she were not yet perfectly awake, as if it would take considerably more than the siege–guns of Namur to rouse her. She moves about slowly, as if she were in no sort of hurry for the

[2] It would be truer to say she was in love with duty which was often dangerous.
[3] She very soon let us know why. "Followed" is the wrong word.

adventure. She has slow–moving eyes, with sleepy, drooping eyelids that blink at you. She has a rather sleepy, rather drooping nose. Her shoulders droop; her small head droops, slightly, half the time. If she were not so slender she would be rather like a pretty dormouse half–recovering from its torpor. You insist on the determination of her little thrust–out underlip, only to be contradicted by her gentle and delicately–retreating chin.

In our committee–room, among a band of turbulent female volunteers, all clamouring for the firing–line, Ursula Dearmer, dressed very simply, rather like a senior school–girl, and accompanied by her mother, had a most engaging air of submission and docility. If anybody breaks out into bravura it will not be Ursula Dearmer.

This thought consoles me when I think of the last solemn scenes in that committee–room and of the pledges, the frightfully sacred pledges, I gave to Ursula Dearmer's mother. As a result of this responsibility I see myself told off to the dreary duty of conducting Ursula Dearmer back to Dover at the moment when things begin to be really thick and thrilling. And I deplore the Commandant's indiscriminate hospitality to volunteers.

Mrs. Lambert (she must surely be the next youngest) you can think of with less agitation, in spite of her youth, her charming eyes and the recklessly extravagant quantity of her golden hair. For she is an American citizen, and she has a husband (also an American citizen) in Ghent, and her husband has a high–speed motor–car, and if the Germans should ever advance upon this city he can be relied upon to take her out of it before they can possibly get in. Besides, even in the German lines American citizens are safe.

We are all suffering a slight tension. The men, who can see no reason why the ambulance should not have been sent out last night, are restless and abstracted and impatient for the order to get up and go. No wonder. They have been waiting five weeks for their chance.

There is Dr. Haynes, whose large dark head and heavy shoulders look as if they sustained the whole weight of an intolerable world. His features, designed for sensuous composure, brood in a sad and sulky resignation to the boredom of delay.

His friend, Dr. Bird, the young man with the head of an enormous cherub and the hair of a blond baby, hair that *will* fall in a shining lock on his pink forehead, Dr. Bird has an air of boisterous preparation, as if the ambulance were a picnic party and he was responsible for the champagne.

Mr. Foster, the inquiring tourist, looks a little anxious, as if he were preoccupied with the train he's got to catch.

Bert, the chauffeur, sits tight with the grim assurance of a man who knows that the expedition cannot start without him. The chauffeur Tom has an expressive face. Every minute it becomes more vivid with humorous, contemptuous, indignant protest. It says plainly: "Well, this is about the rottenest show I ever was let in for. Bar none. Call yourself a field ambulance? Garn! And if you *are* a field ambulance, who but a blanky fool would have hit upon this old blankety haunt of peace. It'll be the 'Ague Conference next!"

But it is on the Chaplain, Mr. Grierson, that the strain is telling most. It shows in his pale and prominent blue eyes, and in a slight whiteness about his high cheek–bones. In his valiant khaki he has more than any of us the air of being on the eve. He is visibly bracing himself to a stupendous effort. He smokes a cigarette with ostentatious nonchalance. We all think we know these symptoms. We turn our eyes away, considerately, from Mr. Grierson. Which of us can say that when our turn comes the thought of danger will not spoil our breakfast?

The poor boy squares his shoulders. He is white now round the edges of his lips. But he is going through with it.

Suddenly he speaks.

“I shall hold Matins in this room at ten o’clock every Sunday morning. If any of you like to attend you may.”

There is a terrible silence. None of us look at each other. None of us look at Mr. Grierson.

Presently Mrs. Torrence is heard protesting that we haven’t come here for Matins; that this is a mess–room and not a private chapel; and that Matins are against all military discipline.

“I shall hold Matins all the same,” says Mr. Grierson. His voice is thick and jerky. “And if anybody likes to attend, they can. That’s all I’ve got to say.”

He gets up. He faces the batteries of unholy and unsympathetic eyes. He throws away the end of his cigarette with a gesture of superb defiance.

He has gone through with it. He has faced the fire. He has come out, not quite victorious, but with his hero’s honour unstained.

It seemed to me awful that none of us should want his Matins. I should like, personally, to see him through with them. I could face the hostile eyes. But what I cannot face is the ceremony itself. My *moral* was spoiled with too many ceremonies in my youth; ceremonies that lacked all beauty and sincerity and dignity. And though I am convinced of the beauty and sincerity and dignity of Mr. Grierson’s soul I cannot kneel down with him and take part in the performance of his prayer. Prayer is either the Supreme Illusion, or the Supreme Act, the pure and naked surrender to Reality, and attended by such sacredness and shyness that you can accomplish it only when alone or lost in a multitude that prays.

But why is there no Victoria Cross for moral courage?

(Dr. Wilson has come. He looks clever and nice.)

Our restlessness increases.

11 A.M

I have seen one of them. As I went downstairs this morning, two men carrying a stretcher crossed the landing below. I saw the outline of the wounded body under the blanket, and the head laid back on the pillow.

It is impossible, it is inconceivable, that I should have been afraid of seeing this. It is as if the wounded man himself absolved me from the memory and the reproach of fear.

I stood by the stair–rail to let them pass. There was some difficulty about turning at the stair–head. Mr. Riley was there. He came forward and took one end of the stretcher and turned it. He was very quiet and very gentle. You could see that he did the right thing by instinct. And I saw his face, and knew what had brought him here.

And here on the first landing is another wounded. His face is deformed by an abscess from a bullet in his mouth. It gives him a terrible look, half savage, wholly suffering. He sits there and cannot speak.

Mr. Riley is the only one of us who has found anything to do. So presently we go out to get our military passes. We stroll miserably about the town, oppressed with a sense of our futility. We buy cigarettes for the convalescents.

And at noon no orders have come for us.

They come just as we are sitting down to lunch. Our ambulance car is to go to Alost at once. The Commandant is arrested in the act of cutting bread. Dr. Bird is arrested in the act of

eating it. We are all arrested in our several acts. As if they had been criminal acts, we desist suddenly. The men get up and look at each other. It is clear that they cannot all go. Mr. Grierson looks at the Commandant. His face is a little white and strained, as it was this morning when he announced Matins for ten o'clock.

The Commandant looks at Dr. Bird and tells him that he may go if he likes. His tone is admirably casual; it conveys no sense of the magnificence of his renunciation. He looks also at Mr. Grierson and Mr. Foster. The lot of honour falls upon these three.

They set out, still with their air of a youthful picnic party. Dr. Bird is more than ever the boisterous young man in charge of the champagne.

I am contented so long as Ursula Dearmer and Mrs. Lambert and Mrs. Torrence and Janet McNeil and the Commandant do not go yet. To anybody who knows the Commandant he is bound to be a prominent figure in the terrible moving pictures made by fear. Smitten by some great idea, he dashes out of cover as the shrapnel is falling. He wanders, wrapped in a happy dream, into the enemies' trenches. He mingles with their lines of communication as I have seen him mingle with the traffic at the junction of Chandos Street and the Strand. If you were to inform him of a patrol of Uhlans coming down the road, he would only say, "I see no Uhlans," and continue in their direction. It is inconceivable to his optimism that he should encounter Uhlans in a world so obviously made for peace and righteousness.

So that it is a relief to see somebody else (whom I do not know quite so well) going first. Time enough to be jumpy when the Commandant and the women go forth on the perilous adventure.

That is all very well. But I am jumpy all the same. By the mere fact that they are going out first Mr. Grierson and Mr. Foster have suddenly become dear and sacred. Their lives, their persons, their very clothes—Dr. Bird's cheerful face, which is so like an overgrown cherub's, his blond, gold lock of infantile hair, Mr. Grierson's pale eyes that foresee danger, his not too well fitting khaki coat—have acquired suddenly a priceless value, the value of things long seen and long admired. It is as if I had known them all my life; as if life will be unendurable if they do not come back safe.

It is not very endurable now. Of all the things that can happen to a woman on a field ambulance, the worst is to stay behind. To stay behind with nothing in the world to do but to devise a variety of dreadful deaths for Tom, the chauffeur, and Dr. Bird and Mr. Grierson and Mr. Foster. To know nothing except that Alost is being bombarded and that it is to Alost that they are going.

And the others who have been left behind are hanging about in gloom, disgusted with their fate. Mrs. Torrence and Janet McNeil are beginning to ask themselves what they are here for. To go through the wards is only to be in the way of the angelic beings with red crosses on their breasts and foreheads who are already somewhat in each other's way. Mrs. Torrence and the others do, however, go into the wards and talk to the wounded and cheer them up. I sit in the deserted mess–room, and look at the lunch that Tom and Dr. Bird and Mr. Grierson should have eaten and were obliged to leave behind. I would give anything to be able to go round the wards and cheer the wounded up. I wonder whether there is anything I could conceivably do for the wounded that would not bore them inexpressibly if I were to do it. I frame sentence after sentence in strange and abominable French, and each, apart from its own inherent absurdity, seems a mockery of the wounded. You cannot go to an immortal hero and grin at him and say *Comment allez–vous?* and expect him to be cheered up, especially when you know yourself to be one of a long procession of women who have done the same.

I abandon myself to my malady of self–distrust.

It is at its worst when Jean and Max, the convalescent orderlies, come in to remove the ruins of our mess. They are pathetic and adorable with their close–cropped heads in the pallor of their convalescence (Jean is attired in a suit of yellowish linen and Max in striped flannels). Jean's pallor is decorated (there is no other word for it) with blue–grey eyes, black eyebrows, black eyelashes and a little black moustache. He is martial and ardent and alert. But the pallor of Max is unredeemed; it is morbid and profound. It has invaded his whole being. His eyelids and his small sensitive mouth are involved; and his round dark eyes have the queer grey look of some lamentable wonder and amazement. But neither horror nor discipline have spoiled his engaging air—the air of a very young *collégien* who has broken loose and got into this Military Hospital by mistake.

I do not know whether intuition is a French or Belgian gift. Jean and Max are not Belgian but French, and they have it to a marvellous degree. They seemed to know in an instant what was the matter with the English lady; and they set about curing the malady. I have seldom seen such perfect tact and gentleness as was then displayed by those two hospital orderlies, Max and Jean. They had been wounded not so very long ago. But they think nothing of that. They intimate that if I insist on helping them with their plates and dishes they will be wounded, and more severely, in their honour.

We converse.

It is in conversation that they are most adorable. They gaze at you with candid, innocent eyes; not a quiver of a lip or an eyelash betrays to you the outrageous quality of your French. The behaviour of your sentences would cause a scandal in a private boarding school for young ladies, it is so fantastically incorrect. But Max and Jean receive each phrase with an imperturbable and charming gravity. By the subtlest suggestion of manner they assure you that you speak with fluency and distinction, that yours is a very perfect French. Only their severe attentiveness warns you of the strain you are putting on them.

Max lingered long after Jean had departed to his kitchen. And presently he gave up his secret. He is a student, and they took him from his College (his course unfinished) to fight for his country. When the War broke out his mother went mad with the horror of it. He told me this quite simply, as if he were relating a common incident of war–time. Then, with a little air of mystery, he signed to me to follow him along the corridor. He stopped at a closed door and showed me a name inscribed in thick ornamental Gothic characters on a card tacked to the panel:

Prosper Panne

Max is not his real name. It is the name that Prosper Panne has taken to disguise himself while he is a servant. Prosper Panne—*il est écrivain, journaliste*. He writes for the Paris papers. He looked at me with his amazed, pathetic eyes, and pointed with a finger to his breast to assure me that he is he, Prosper Panne.

And in the end I asked him whether it would bore the wounded frightfully if I took them some cigarettes? (I laid in cigarettes this morning as a provision for this desolate afternoon.)

And—dear Prosper Panne—so thoroughly did he understand my malady, that he himself escorted me. It is as if he knew the *peur sacré* that restrains me from flinging myself into the presence of the wounded. Soft–footed and graceful, turning now and then with his instinct of protection, the orderly glides before me, smoothing the way between my shyness and this dreaded majesty of suffering.

I followed him (with my cigarettes in my hand and my heart in my mouth) into the big ward on the ground floor.

I don't want to describe that ward, or the effect of those rows upon rows of beds, those rows upon rows of bound and bandaged bodies, the intensity of physical anguish suggested by sheer force of multiplication, by the diminishing perspective of the beds, by the clear light and nakedness of the great hall that sets these repeated units of torture in a world apart, a world of insufferable space and agonizing time, ruled by some inhuman mathematics and given over to pure transcendent pain. A sufficiently large ward full of wounded really does leave an impression very like that. But the one true thing about this impression is its transcendence. It is utterly removed from and unlike anything that you have experienced before. From the moment that the doors have closed behind you, you are in another world, and under its strange impact you are given new senses and a new soul. If there is horror here you are not aware of it as horror. Before these multiplied forms of anguish what you feel—if there be anything of *you* left to feel—is not pity, because it is so near to adoration.

If you are tired of the burden and malady of self, go into one of these great wards and you will find instant release. You and the sum of your little consciousness are not things that matter any more. The lowest and the least of these wounded Belgians is of supreme importance and infinite significance. You, who were once afraid of them and of their wounds, may think that you would suffer for them now, gladly; but you are not allowed to suffer; you are marvellously and mercilessly let off. In this sudden deliverance from yourself you have received the ultimate absolution, and their torment is your peace.

In the big ward very few of the men were well enough to smoke. So we went to the little wards where the convalescents are, Max leading.

I do not think that Max has received absolution yet. It is quite evident that he is proud of his *entrée* into this place and of his intimacy with the wounded, of his rôle of interpreter.

But how perfectly he does it! He has no Flemish, but through his subtle gestures even the poor Flamand, who has no French, understands what I want to say to him and can't. He turns this modest presentation of cigarettes into a high social function, a trifle ambitious, perhaps, but triumphantly achieved.

All that was over by about three o'clock, when the sanctuary cast us out, and Max went back to his empty kitchen and became Prosper Panne again, and remembered that his mother was mad; and I went to the empty mess–room and became my miserable self and remembered that the Field Ambulance was still out, God knows where.

The mess–room windows look south over the railway lines towards the country where the fighting is. From the balcony you can see the lines where the troop trains run, going north–west and south–east. The Station, the Post Office, the Telegraph and Telephone Offices are here, all in one long red–brick building that bounds one side of the *Place*. It stands at right angles to the Flandria and stretches along opposite its flank. It has a flat roof with a crenelated parapet. Grass grows on the roof. No guns are mounted there, for Ghent is an open city. But in German tactics bombardment by aeroplane doesn't seem to count, and our situation is more provocative now than the Terminus Hotel at Ostend.

Beyond the straight black railway lines are miles upon miles of flat open country, green fields and rows of poplars, and little woods, and here and there a low rise dark with trees. Under our windows the white street runs south–eastward, and along it scouting cars and cycling corps rush to the fighting lines, and military motor–cars hurry impatiently, carrying Belgian staff officers; the ammunition wagons lumber along, and the troops march in a long file, to disappear round the turn of the road. That is where the others have gone, and I'd give everything I possess to go with them.

They have come back, incredibly safe, and have brought in four wounded.

There was a large crowd gathered in the *Place* to see them come, a crowd that has nothing to do and that lives from hour to hour on this spectacle of the wounded. Intense excitement this time, for one of the four wounded is a German. He was lying on a stretcher. No sooner had they drawn him out of the ambulance than they put him back again. (No Germans are taken in at our Hospital; they are all sent to the old *Hôpital Militaire* No. I.) He thrust up his poor hand and grabbed the hanging strap to raise himself a little in his stretcher, and I saw him. He was ruddy and handsome. His thick blond hair stood up stiff from his forehead. His little blond moustache was turned up and twisted fiercely like the Kaiser's. The crowd booed at him as he lay there. His was a terrible pathos, unlike any other. He was so defiant and so helpless. And there's another emotion gone by the board. You simply could not hate him.

Later in the evening both cars were sent out, Car No. 1 with the Commandant and, if you will believe it, Ursula Dearmer. Heavens! What can the Military Power be thinking of? Car No. 2 took Dr. Wilson and Mrs. Torrence. The Military Power, I suppose, has ordained this too. And when I think of Mrs. Torrence's dream of getting into the greatest possible danger, I am glad that the Commandant is with Ursula Dearmer. We pledged our words, he and I, that danger and Ursula Dearmer should never meet.

They all come back, impossibly safe. They are rather like children after the party, too excited to give a lucid and coherent tale of what they've done. My ambulance Day–Book stores the stuff from which reports and newspaper articles are to be made. I note that Car No. 1 has brought three wounded to Hospital I., and that Car No. 2 has brought four wounded to Hospital II., also that a dum–dum bullet has been found in the hand of one of the three. There is a considerable stir among the surgeons over this bullet. They are vaguely gratified at its being found in our hospital and not the other.

Little Janet McNeil and Mr. Riley and all the others who were left behind have gone to bed in hopeless gloom. Even the bullet hasn't roused them beyond the first tense moment.

I ask for ink, and dear Max has given me all his in his own ink–pot.

Monday, 28th

We have been here a hundred years.

Car No. 1 went out at eight–thirty this morning, with the Commandant and Dr. Bird and Ursula Dearmer and Mr. Grierson and a Belgian Red Cross guide. With Tom, the chauffeur, that makes six. Tom's face, as he sees this party swarming on his car, is expressive of tumultuous passions. Disgust predominates.

Their clothes seem stranger than ever by contrast with the severe military khaki of the car. Dr. Bird has added to his civilian costume a Belgian forage cap with a red tassel that hangs over his forehead. It was given to him yesterday by way of homage to his courage and his personal charm. But it makes him horribly vulnerable. The Chaplain, standing out from the rest of the Corps in complete khaki, is an even more inevitable mark for bullets. Tom stares at everybody with eyes of violent inquiry. He still evidently wants to know whether we call ourselves a field ambulance. He starts his car with movements of exasperation and despair. We are to judge what his sense of discipline must be since he consents to drive the thing at all.

The Commandant affects not to see Tom. Perhaps he really doesn't see him.

It is just as well that he can't see Mrs. Torrence, or Janet McNeil or Mr. Riley or Dr. Haynes. They are overpowered by this tragedy of being left behind. Under it the discipline of the — Hospital breaks down. The eighteen–year–old child is threatening to commit suicide or else go home. She regards the two acts as equivalent. Mr. Riley's gloom is now so awful that he will not speak when he is spoken to. He looks at me with dumb hostility, as if he thought that I had something to do with it. Dr. Haynes's melancholy is even more heart–rending, because it is gentle and unexpressed.

I try to console them. I point out that it is a question of arithmetic. There are only two cars and there are fourteen of us. Fourteen into two won't go, even if you don't count the wounded. And, after all, we haven't been here two days. But it is no good. We have been here a hundred years, and we have done nothing. There isn't anything to do. There are not enough wounded to go round. We turn our eyes with longing towards Antwerp, so soon to be battered by the siege–guns from Namur.

And Bert, poor Bert! he has crawled into Ambulance Car No. 2 where it stands outside in the hospital yard, and he has hidden himself under the hood.

Mrs. Lambert is a little sad, too. But we are none of us very sorry for Mrs. Lambert. We have gathered that her husband is a journalist, and that he is special correspondent at the front for some American paper. He has a motor–car which we assume rashly to be the property of his paper. He is always dashing off to the firing–line in it, and Mrs. Lambert is always at liberty to go with him. She is mistaken if she thinks that her sorrow is in any way comparable with ours.

But if there are not enough wounded to go round in Ghent, there are more refugees than Ghent can deal with. They are pouring in by all the roads from Alost and Termonde. Every train disgorges multitudes of them into the *Place*.

This morning I went to the Matron, Madame F., and told her I wasn't much good, but I'd be glad if she could give me some work. I said I supposed there was some to be done among the refugees.

Work? Among the refugees? They could employ whole armies of us. There are thousands of refugees at the Palais des Fêtes. I had better go there and see what is being done. Madame will give me an introduction to her sister–in–law, Madame F., the Présidente of the Comité des Dames, and to her niece, Mademoiselle F., who will take me to the Palais.

And Madame adds that there will soon be work for all of us in the Hospital. Yes: even for the untrained.

Life is once more bearable.

But the others won't believe it. They say there are three hundred nurses in the hospital.

And the fact remains that we have two young surgeons cooling their heels in the corridors, and a fully–trained nurse tearing her hair out, while the young girl, Ursula Dearmer, takes the field.

And I think of the poor little dreamy, guileless Commandant in his conspicuous car, and I smile at her in secret, thanking Heaven that it's Ursula Dearmer and not Mrs. Torrence who is at his side.

The ambulance has come back from Alost with two or three wounded and some refugees. The Commandant is visibly elated, elated out of all proportion to the work actually done. Ursula Dearmer is not elated in the very least, but she is wide–awake. Her docility has vanished with her torpor. She and the Commandant both look as if something extremely agreeable had happened to them at Alost. But they are reticent. We gather that Ursula Dearmer has been working with the nuns in the Convent at Alost, where the wounded were taken before the ambulance cars removed them to Ghent. It sounded very safe.

But the Commandant dashed into my room after luncheon. His face was radiant, almost ecstatic. He was like a child who has rushed in to tell you how ripping the pantomime was.

"We've been *under fire*!"

But I was very angry. Coldly and quietly angry. I felt like that when I was ten years old and piloting my mother through the thick of the traffic between Guildhall and the Bank, and she broke from me and was all but run over. I don't quite know what I said to him, but I think I said he ought to be ashamed of himself. For it seems that Ursula Dearmer was with him.

I remembered how Ursula Dearmer's mother had come to me in the committee–room and asked me how near we proposed to go to the firing–line, and whether her daughter would be in any danger, and how I said, first of all, that there wasn't any use pretending that there wouldn't be danger, and that the chances were—and how the Commandant had intervened at that moment to assure her that danger there would be none. With a finger on the map of France and Belgium he traced the probable, the inevitable, course of the campaign; and in light, casual tones which allayed all anxiety, he explained how, as the Germans advanced upon any point, we should retire upon our base. As for the actual field–work, with one gesture he swept the whole battle–line into the distance, and you saw it as an infinitely receding tide that left its wrack strewn on a place of peace where the ambulance wandered at its will, secure from danger. The whole thing was done with such compelling and convincing enthusiasm that Ursula Dearmer's mother adopted more and more the humble attitude of a mere woman who has failed to grasp the conditions of modern warfare. Ursula Dearmer herself looked more docile than ever, though a little bored, and very sleepy.

And I remembered how when it was all over Ursula Dearmer's mother implored me, if there *was* any danger, to see that Ursula Dearmer was sent home, and how I promised that whatever happened Ursula Dearmer would be safe, clinching it with a frightfully sacred inner

vow, and saying to myself at the same time what a terrible nuisance this young girl is going to be. I saw myself at the moment of parting, standing on the hearthrug, stiff as a poker with resolution, and saying solemnly, “I’ll keep my word!”

And here was the Commandant informing me with glee that a shell had fallen and burst at Ursula Dearmer’s feet.

He was so pleased, and with such innocent and childlike pleasure, that I hadn’t the heart to tell him that there wasn’t much resemblance between those spaces of naked peace behind the receding battle–line and the narrow streets of a bombarded village. I only said that I should write to Ursula Dearmer’s mother and ask her to release me from my promise. He said I would do nothing of the kind. I said I would. And I did. And the poor Commandant left me, somewhat dashed, and not at all pleased with me.

It seems that the shell burst, not exactly at Ursula Dearmer’s feet, but ten yards away from her. It came romping down the street with immense impetus and determination; and it is not said of Ursula Dearmer that she was much less coy in the encounter. She took to shell–fire “like a duck to water.”

Dr. Bird told us this. Ursula Dearmer herself was modest, and claimed no sort of intimacy with the shell that waked her up. She was as nice as possible about it. But all the same, into the whole Corps (that part of it that had been left behind) there has crept a sneaking envy of her luck. I feel it myself. And if *I* feel it, what must Mrs. Torrence and Janet feel?

Mrs. Lambert, anyhow, has had nothing to complain of so far. Her husband took her to Alost in his motor–car; I mean the motor–car which is the property of his paper.

In the afternoon Mademoiselle F. called to take me to the Palais des Fêtes. We stopped at a shop on the way to buy the Belgian Red Cross uniform—the white linen overall and veil—which you must wear if you work among the refugees there.

Madame F. is very kind and very tired. She has been working here since early morning for weeks on end. They are short of volunteers for the service of the evening meals, and I am to work at the tables for three hours, from six to nine P.M. This is settled, and a young Red Cross volunteer takes me over the Palais. It is an immense building, rather like Olympia. It stands away from the town in open grounds like the Botanical Gardens, Regent’s Park. It is where the great Annual Shows were held and the vast civic entertainments given. Miles of country round Ghent are given up to market–gardening. There are whole fields of begonias out here, brilliant and vivid in the sun. They will never be sold, never gathered, never shown in the Palais des Fêtes. It is the peasants, the men and women who tilled these fields, and their children that are being shown here, in the splendid and wonderful place where they never set foot before.

There are four thousand of them lying on straw in the outer hall, in a space larger than Olympia. They are laid out in rows all round the four walls, and on every foot of ground between; men, women and children together, packed so tight that there is barely standing–room between any two of them. Here and there a family huddles up close, trying to put a few inches between it and the rest; some have hollowed out a place in the straw or piled a barrier of straw between themselves and their neighbours, in a piteous attempt at privacy; some have dragged their own bedding with them and are lodged in comparative comfort. But these are the very few. The most part are utterly destitute, and utterly abandoned to their destitution. They are broken with fatigue. They have stumbled and dropped no matter where, no matter beside whom. None turns from his neighbour; none scorns or hates or loathes his fellow. The rigidly righteous *bourgeoise* lies in the straw breast to breast with the harlot of the village

slum, and her innocent daughter back to back with the parish drunkard. Nothing matters. Nothing will ever matter any more.

They tell you that when darkness comes down on all this there is hell. But you do not believe it. You can see nothing sordid and nothing ugly here. The scale is too vast. Your mind refuses this coupling of infamy with transcendent sorrow. It rejects all images but the one image of desolation which is final and supreme. It is as if these forms had no stability and no significance of their own; as if they were locked together in one immense body and stirred or slept as one.

Two or three figures mount guard over this litter of prostrate forms. They are old men and old women seated on chairs. They sit upright and immobile, with their hands folded on their knees. Some of them have fallen asleep where they sit. They are all rigid in an attitude of resignation. They have the dignity of figures that will endure, like that, for ever. They are Flamands.

This place is terribly still. There is hardly any rustling of the straw. Only here and there the cry of a child fretting for sleep or for its mother's breast. These people do not speak to each other. Half of them are sound asleep, fixed in the posture they took when they dropped into the straw. The others are drowsed with weariness, stupefied with sorrow. On all these thousands of faces there is a mortal apathy. Their ruin is complete. They have been stripped bare of the means of life and of all likeness to living things. They do not speak. They do not think. They do not, for the moment, feel. In all the four thousand—except for the child crying yonder—there is not one tear.

And you who look at them cannot speak or think or feel either, and you have not one tear. A path has been cleared through the straw from door to door down the middle of the immense hall, a narrower track goes all round it in front of the litters that are ranged under the walls, and you are taken through and round the Show. You are to see it all. The dear little Belgian lady, your guide, will not let you miss anything. "*Regardez, Mademoiselle, ces deux petites filles. Qu'elles sont jolies, les pauvres petites.*" "*Voici deux jeunes mariés, qui dorment. Regardez l'homme; il tient encore la main de sa femme.*"

You look. Yes. They are asleep. He is really holding her hand. "*Et ces quatre petits enfants qui ont perdu leur père et leur mère. C'est triste, n'est–ce pas, Mademoiselle?*"

And you say, "*Oui, Mademoiselle. C'est bien triste.*"

But you don't mean it. You don't feel it. You don't know whether it is "*triste*" or not. You are not sure that "*triste*" is the word for it. There are no words for it, because there are no ideas for it. It is a sorrow that transcends all sorrow that you have ever known. You have a sort of idea that perhaps, if you can ever feel again, this sight will be worse to remember than it is to see. You can't believe what you see; you are stunned, stupefied, as if you yourself had been crushed and numbed in the same catastrophe. Only now and then a face upturned (a face that your guide hasn't pointed out to you) surging out of this incredible welter of faces and forms, smites you with pity, and you feel as if you had received a lacerating wound in sleep.

Little things strike you, though. Already you are forgetting the faces of the two little girls and of the young husband and wife holding each other's hands, and of the four little children who have lost their father and mother, but you notice the little dog, the yellow–brown mongrel terrier, that absurd little dog which belongs to all nations and all countries. He has obtained possession of the warm centre of a pile of straw and is curled up on it fast asleep. And the Flemish family who brought him, who carried him in turn for miles rather than leave him to the Germans, they cannot stretch themselves on the straw because of him. They have propped

themselves up as best they may all round him, and they cannot sleep, they are too uncomfortable.

More thousands than there is room for in the straw are fed three times a day in the inner hall, leading out of this dreadful dormitory. All round the inner hall and on the upper story off the gallery are rooms for washing and dressing the children and for bandaging sore feet and attending to the wounded. For there are many wounded among the refugees. This part of the Palais is also a hospital, with separate wards for men, for women and children and for special cases.

Late in the evening M. P— took the whole Corps to see the Palais des Fêtes, and I went again. By night I suppose it is even more "*triste*" than it was by day. In the darkness the gardens have taken on some malign mystery and have given it to the multitudes that move there, that turn in the winding paths among ghostly flowers and bushes, that approach and recede and approach in the darkness of the lawns. Blurred by the darkness and diminished to the barest indications of humanity, their forms are more piteous and forlorn than ever; their faces, thrown up by the darkness, more awful in their blankness and their pallor. The scene, drenched in darkness, is unearthly and unintelligible. You cannot account for it in saying to yourself that these are the refugees, and everybody knows what a refugee is; that there is War—and everybody knows what war is—in Belgium; and that these people have been shelled out of their homes and are here at the Palais des Fêtes, because there is no other place for them, and the kind citizens of Ghent have undertaken to house and feed them here. That doesn't make it one bit more credible or bring you nearer to the secret of these forms. You who are compelled to move with them in the sinister darkness are more than ever under the spell that forbids you and them to feel. You are deadened now to the touch of the incarnate.

On the edge of the lawn, near the door of the Palais, some ghostly roses are growing on a ghostly tree. Your guide, M. P—, pauses to tell you their names and kind. It seems that they are rare.

Several hundred more refugees have come into the Palais since the afternoon. They have had to pack them a little closer in the straw. Eight thousand were fed this evening in the inner hall.

In the crush I get separated from M. P— and from the Corps. I see some of them in the distance, the Commandant and Ursula Dearmer and Mrs. Lambert and M. P—. I do not feel as if I belonged to them any more. I belong so much to the stunned sleepers in the straw who cannot feel.

Nice Dr. Wilson comes across to me and we go round together, looking at the sleepers. He says that nothing he has seen of the War has moved him so much as this sight. He wishes that the Kaiser could be brought here to see what he has done. And I find myself clenching my hands tight till it hurts, not to suppress my feelings—for I feel nothing—but because I am afraid that kind Dr. Wilson is going to talk. At the same time, I would rather he didn't leave me just yet. There is a sort of comfort and protection in being with somebody who isn't callous, who can really feel.

But Dr. Wilson isn't very fluent, and presently he leaves off talking, too.

Near the door we pass the family with the little yellow–brown dog. All day the little dog slept in their place. And now that they are trying to sleep he will not let them. The little dog is wide awake and walking all over them. And when you think what it must have cost to bring him—

C'est triste, n'est–ce pas?

As we left the gardens M. P— gathered two ghostly roses, the last left on their tree, and gave one to Mrs. Lambert and one to me. I felt something rather like a pang then. Heaven knows why, for such a little thing.

Conference in our mess–room. M. —, the Belgian Red Cross guide who goes out with our ambulances, is there. He is very serious and important. The Commandant calls us to come and hear what he has to say. It seems it had been arranged that one of our cars should be sent to–morrow morning to Termonde to bring back refugees. But M. — does not think that car will ever start. He says that the Germans are now within a few miles of Ghent, and may be expected to occupy it to–morrow morning, and that instead of going to Termonde to–morrow we had very much better pack up and retreat to Bruges to–night. There are ten thousand Germans ready to march into Ghent.

M. — is weighed down by the thought of his ten thousand Germans. But the Commandant is not weighed down a bit. On the contrary, a pleasant exaltation comes upon him. It comes upon the whole Corps, it comes even upon me. We refuse to believe in his ten thousand Germans. M. — himself cannot swear to them. We refuse to pack up. We refuse to retreat to Bruges to–night. Time enough for agitation in the morning. We prefer to go to bed. M. — shrugs his shoulders, as much as to say that he has done his duty and if we are all murdered in our beds it isn't his fault.

Does M. — really believe in the advance of the ten thousand? His face is inscrutable.

Tuesday, 29th

No Germans in Ghent. No Germans reported near Ghent.

Madame F. and her daughter smile at the idea of the Germans coming into Ghent. They will never come, and if they do come they will only take a little food and go out again. They will never do any harm to Ghent. Namur and Liége and Brussels, if you like, and Malines, and Louvain, and Termonde and Antwerp (perhaps); but Ghent—why should they? It is Antwerp they are making for, not Ghent.

And Madame represents the mind of the average Gantois. It is placid, incredulous, stolidly at ease, superbly inhospitable to disagreeable ideas. No Gantois can conceive that what has been done to the citizens of Termonde would be done to him. *C'est triste*—what has been done to the citizens of Termonde, but it doesn't shake his belief in the immunity of Ghent.

Which makes M. —'s behaviour all the more mysterious. *Why* did he try to scare us so? Five theories are tenable:

(1.) M. — did honestly believe that ten thousand Germans would come in the morning and take our ambulance prisoner. That is to say, he believed what nobody else believed.

(2.) M. — was scared himself. He had no desire to be taken quite so near the firing–line as the English Ambulance seemed likely to take him; so that the departure of the English Ambulance would not be wholly disagreeable to M. —. (This theory is too far–fetched.)

(3.) M. — was the agent of the Military Power, commissioned to test the nerve of the English Ambulance. ("Stood fire, have they? Give 'em a *real* scare, and see how they behave.")

(4.) M. — is a psychologist and made this little experiment on the English Ambulance himself.

(5.) He is a humorist and was simply "pulling its leg."

The three last theories are plausible, but all five collapse before the inscrutability of Monsieur's face.

Germans or no Germans, one ambulance car started at five in the morning for Quatrecht, somewhere between Ghent and Brussels, to fetch wounded and refugees. The other went, later, to Zele. I am not very clear as to who has gone with them, but Mrs. Torrence, Mrs. Lambert, Janet McNeil and Dr. Haynes and Mr. Riley have been left behind.

It is their third day of inactivity, and three months of it could not have devastated them more. They have touched the very bottom of suicidal gloom. Three months hence their state of mind will no doubt appear in all its absurdity, but at the moment it is too piteous for words. When you think what they were yesterday and the day before, there is no language to express the crescendo of their despair. I came upon Mr. Riley this morning, standing by the window of the mess–room, and contemplating the façade of the railway station. (It is making a pattern on our brains.) I tried to soothe him. I said it was hard lines—beastly hard lines—and told him to cheer up—there'd be heaps for him to do presently. And he turned from me like a man who has just buried his first–born.

Janet McNeil is even more heart–rending, sunk in a chair with her hands stuck into the immense pockets of her overcoat, her flawless and impassive face tilted forward as her head droops forlornly to her breast. She is such a child that she can see nothing beyond to–day, and yesterday and the day before that. She is going back to–morrow. Her valour and energy are

frustrated and she is wounded in her honour. She is conscious of the rottenness of putting on a khaki tunic, and winding khaki putties round and round her legs to hang about the Hospital doing nothing. And she had to sell her motor bicycle in order to come out. Not that that matters in the least. What matters is that we are here, eating Belgian food and quartered in a Belgian Military Hospital, and "swanking" about with Belgian Red Cross brassards (stamped) on our sleeves, and doing nothing for the Belgians, doing nothing for anybody. We are not justifying our existence. We are frauds.

I tell the poor child that she cannot possibly feel as big a fraud as I do; that there was no earthly reason why I should have come, and none whatever why I should remain.

And then, to my amazement, I learn that I am envied. It's all right for me. My job is clearly defined, and nobody can take it from me. I haven't got to wind khaki putties round my legs for nothing.

I should have thought that the child was making jokes at my expense but for the extreme purity and candour of her gaze. Incredible that there should exist an abasement profounder than my own. I have hidden my tunic and breeches in my hold–all. I dare not own to having brought them.

Down in the vestibule I encounter Mrs. Torrence in khaki. Mrs. Torrence yearning for her wounded. Mrs. Torrence determined to get to her wounded at any cost. She is not abased or dejected, but exalted, rather. She is ready to go to the President or to the Military Power itself, and demand her wounded from them. Her beautiful eyes demand them from Heaven itself.

I cannot say there are not enough wounded to go round, but I point out for the fifteenth time that the trouble is there are not enough ambulance cars to go round.

But it is no use. It does not explain why Heaven should have chosen Ursula Dearmer and caused shells to bound in her direction, and have rejected Mrs. Torrence. The Military Power that should have ordered these things has abandoned us to the caprice of Heaven.

Of course if Mrs. Torrence was a saint she would fold her hands and bow her superb little head before the decrees of Heaven; but she is only a mortal woman, born with the genius of succour and trained to the last point of efficiency; so she rages. The tigress, robbed of her young, is not more furiously inconsolable than Mrs. Torrence.

It is not Ursula Dearmer's fault. She is innocent of supplanting Mrs. Torrence. The thing simply happened. More docile than determined, unhurrying and uneager, and only half–awake, she seems to have rolled into Car No. 1 with Heaven's impetus behind her. Like the shell at Alost, it is her luck.

And on the rest of us our futility and frustration weigh like lead. The good Belgian food has become bitter in our mouths. When we took our miserable walk through Ghent this morning we felt that*l'Ambulance Anglaise* must be a mark for public hatred and derision because of us. I declare I hardly dare go into the shops with the Red Cross brassard on my arm. I imagine sardonic raillery in the eyes of every Belgian that I meet. We do not think the authorities will stand it much longer; they will fire us out of the *Hôpital Militaire* No. II.

But no, the authorities do not fire us out. Impassive in wisdom and foreknowledge, they smile benignly on our agitation. They compliment the English Ambulance on the work it has done already. They convey the impression that but for the English Ambulance the Belgian Army would be in a bad way. Mademoiselle F. insists that the Hospital will soon be overflowing with the wounded from Antwerp and that she can find work even for me. It is untrue that

there are three hundred nurses in the Hospital. There are only three hundred nurses in all Belgium. They pile it on so that we are more depressed than ever.

Janet McNeil is convinced that they think we are no good and that they are just being angels to us because they are sorry for us.

I break it to them very gently that I've volunteered to serve at the tables at the Palais des Fêtes. I feel as if I had sneaked into a remunerative job while my comrades are starving.

The Commandant is not quite as pleased as I thought he would be to hear of my engagement at the Palais des Fêtes. He says, "It is not your work." I insist that my work is to do anything I can do; and that if I cannot dress wounds I can at least hand round bread and pour out coffee and wash up dishes. It is true that I am Secretary and Reporter and (for the time being) Treasurer to the Ambulance, and that I carry its funds in a leather purse belt round my body. Because I am the smallest and weakest member of the Corps that is the most unlikely place for the funds to be. It was imprudent, to say the least of it, for the Chaplain in his khaki, to carry them, as he did, into the firing–line. The belt, which fitted the Chaplain, hangs about half a yard below my waist and is extremely uncomfortable, but that is neither here nor there. Keeping the Corps' accounts only takes two hours and a half, even with Belgian and English money mixed, and when I've added the same column of figures ten times up and ten times down, to make certain it's all right (I am no good at accounts, but I know my weakness and guard against it, giving the Corps the benefit of every doubt and making good every deficit out of my private purse). Writing the Day–Book—perhaps half an hour. The Commandant's correspondence, when he has any, and reporting to the British Red Cross Society, when there is anything to report, another half–hour at the outside; and there you have only three and a half hours employed out of the twenty–four, even if I balanced my accounts every day, and I don't.

True that *The Daily Chronicle* promised to take any articles that I might send them from the front, but I haven't written any. You cannot write articles for *The Daily Chronicle* out of nothing; at least I can't.

The Commandant finally yields to argument and entreaty.

* * * * *

I do not tell him that what I really want to do is to go out with the Field Ambulance, and get beyond the turn of that road.

I know I haven't the ghost of a chance; I know that if I had—as things stand at present—not being a surgeon or a trained nurse, I wouldn't take it, even to get there. And at the same time I know, with a superior certainty, that this unlikely thing will happen. This sense of certainty is not at all uncommon, but it is, or seems, unintelligible. You can only conceive it as a premonition of some unavoidable event. It is as if something had been looking for you, waiting for you, from all eternity out here; something that you have been looking for; and, when you are getting near, it begins calling to you; it draws your heart out to it all day long. You can give no account of it. All that you know about it is that it is unique. It has nothing to do with your ordinary curiosities and interests and loves; nothing to do with the thirst for experience, or for adventure, or for glory, or for the thrill. You can't "get" anything out of it. It is something hidden and secret and supremely urgent. Its urgency, indeed, is so great that if you miss it you will have missed reality itself.

For me this uncanny anticipation is somehow connected with the turn of the south–east road. I do not see how I am ever going to get there or anywhere near there. But I am not uneasy or

impatient any more. There is no hurry. The thing, whatever it is, will be irresistible, and if I don't go out to find it, it will find me.

* * * * *

Mrs. Torrence has gone, Heaven knows where. She has not been with the others at the Palais des Fêtes. Janet McNeil and Mrs. Lambert have been working there for five hours, serving meals to the refugees. Ursula Dearmer with extreme docility has been working all the afternoon with the nurses.

It looks as if we were beginning to settle down.

Mrs. Torrence has come back. The red German pom–pom has gone from her cap and she wears the badge of the Belgian Motor Cyclist Corps, black wings on a white ground. Providence has rehabilitated himself. He has abased our trained nurse and expert motorist in order to exalt her. He fairly flung her in the path of the Colonel of (I think) the Belgian Motor Cyclist Corps at a moment when the Colonel found himself in a jibbing motor–car without a chauffeur. We gather that the Colonel was becoming hectic with blasphemy when she appeared and settled the little difficulty between him and his car. She seems to have followed it up by driving him then and there straight up to the firing–line to look for wounded.

End of the adventure—she volunteered her services as chauffeur to the Colonel and was accepted.

The Commandant has received the news with imperturbable optimism.

As for her, she is appeased. She will realize her valorous dream of "the greatest possible danger;" and she will get to her wounded.

The others have come back too. They have toiled for five hours among the refugees.

5.30

It is my turn now at the Palais des Fêtes.

It took ages to get in. The dining–hall is narrower than the sleeping–hall, but it extends beyond it on one side where there is a large door opening on the garden. But this door is closed to the public. You can only reach the dining–hall by going through the straw among the sleepers. And at this point the Commandant's optimism has broken down. He won't let you go in through the straw, and the clerk who controls the entry won't let you go in through the other door. You explain to the clerk that the English Ambulance being quartered in a Military Hospital, its rules are inviolable; it is not allowed to expose itself to the horrors of the straw. The clerk is not interested in the English Ambulance, he is not impressed by the fact that it has volunteered its priceless services to the Refugee Committee, and he is contemptuous of the orders of its Commandant. His business is to see that you go into the Palais through *his* door and not through any other door. And when you tell him that if he will not withdraw his regulations the Ambulance will be compelled to withdraw its services, he replies with delicious sarcasm, "*Nous n'avons pas prévu ça*." In the end you are referred to the Secretary in his bureau. He grasps the situation and is urbanity itself. Provided with a special permit bearing his sacred signature, you are admitted by the other door.

Your passage to the *Vestiaire* takes you through the infants' room and along the galleries past the wards. The crowd of refugees is so great that beds have been put up in the galleries. You take off your outer garments and put on the Belgian Red Cross uniform (you have realized by this time that your charming white overall and veil are sanitary precautions).

Coming down the wide wooden stairways you have a full view of the Inner Hall. This enormous oblong space below the galleries is the heart, the fervid central *foyer* of the Palais des Fêtes. At either end of it is an immense auditorium, tier above tier of seats, rising towards the gallery floors. All down each side of it, standards with triumphal devices are tilted from the balustrade. Banners hang from the rafters.

And under them, down the whole length of the hall from auditorium to auditorium, the tables are set out. Bare wooden tables, one after another, more tables than you can count.

From the door of the sleeping–hall to each auditorium, and from each auditorium down the line of the tables a gangway is roped off for the passage of the refugees.

They say there are ten thousand five hundred here to–night. Beyond the rope–line, along the inner hall, more straw has been laid down to bed the overflow from the outer hall. They come on in relays to be fed. They are marshalled first into the seats of each auditorium, where they sit like the spectators of some monstrous festival and wait for their turn at the tables.

This, the long procession of people streaming in without haste, in perfect order and submission, is heart–rending if you like. The immensity of the crowd no longer overpowers you. The barriers make it a steady procession, a credible spectacle. You can take it in. It is the thin end of the wedge in your heart. They come on so slowly that you can count them as they come. They have sorted themselves out. The fathers and the mothers are together, they lead their little children by the hand or push them gently before them. There is no anticipation in their eyes; no eagerness and no impatience in their bearing. They do not hustle each other or scramble for their places. It is their silence and submission that you cannot stand.

For you have a moment of dreadful inactivity after the setting of the tables for the *premier service*. You have filled your bowls with black coffee; somebody else has laid the slices of white bread on the bare tables. You have nothing to do but stand still and see them file in to the banquet. On the banners and standards from the roof and balustrades the Lion of Flanders ramps over their heads. And somewhere in the back of your brain a song sings itself to a tune that something in your brain wakes up:

_Ils ne vont pas dompter

Le vieux lion de Flandres,

Tant que le lion a des dents,

Tant que le lion peut griffer._

It is the song the Belgian soldiers sang as they marched to battle in the first week of August. It is only the end of September now.

And somebody standing beside you says: "*C'est triste, n'est–ce pas?*"

You cannot look any more.

At the canteen the men are pouring out coffee from enormous enamelled jugs into the small jugs that the waitresses bring. This wastes your time and cools the coffee. So you take a big jug from the men. It seems to you no heavier than an ordinary teapot. And you run with it. To carry the largest possible jug at the swiftest possible pace is your only chance of keeping sane. (It isn't till it is all over that you hear the whisper of "*Anglaise!*" and realize how very far from sane you must have looked running round with your enormous jug.) You can fill up the coffee bowls again—the little bowls full, the big bowls only half full; there is more than enough coffee to go round. But there is no milk except for the babies. And when they ask you for more bread there is not enough to go twice round. The ration is now two slices of dry

bread and a bowl of black coffee three times a day. Till yesterday there was an allowance of meat for soup at the mid–day meal; to–day the army has commandeered all the meat.

But you needn't stand still any more. After the first service the bowls have to be cleared from the tables and washed and laid ready for the next. Round the great wooden tubs there is a frightful competition. It is who can wash and dry and carry back the quickest. You contend with brawny Flemish women for the first dip into the tub and the driest towel. Then you race round the tables with your pile of crockery, and then with your jug, and so on over and over again for three hours, till the last relay is fed and the tables are deserted. You wash up again and it is all over for you till six o'clock to–morrow evening.

You go back to your mess–room and a ten–o'clock supper of cold coffee and sandwiches and Belgian current loaf eaten with butter. And in a nightmare afterwards Belgian refugees gather round you and pluck at your sleeve and cry to you for more bread: "*Une petite tranche de pain, s'il vous plaît, mademoiselle!*"

Wednesday, 30th

No Germans, nor sign of Germans yet.

Fighting is reported at Saint Nicolas, between Antwerp and Ghent. The Commandant has an idea. He says that if the Belgian Army has to meet the Germans at Saint Nicolas, so as to cut off their advance on Antwerp, the base hospital must be removed from Ghent to some centre or point which will bring the Ambulance behind the Belgian lines. He thinks that working from Ghent would necessarily bring it behind the German lines. This is assuming that the Germans coming up from the south–east will cut in between Saint Nicolas and Ghent.

He consults the President, who apparently thinks that the base hospital will do very well where it is.

2.30

Mrs. Torrence brought her Colonel in to lunch. He is battered and grizzled, but still a fine figure in the dark–green uniform of the Motor Cyclist Corps. He is very polite and gallant *à la belge* and vows that he has taken on Mrs. Torrence *pour toujours, pour la vie*! She diverts the flow of urbanity adroitly.

Except the Colonel nothing noteworthy seems to have occurred to–day. The three hours at the Palais des Fêtes were like the three hours last night.

Thursday, October 1st

It really isn't safe for the Commandant to go out with Ursula Dearmer. For her luck in the matter of bombardments continues. (He might just as well be with Mrs. Torrence.) They have been at Termonde. What is more, it was Ursula Dearmer who got them through, in spite of the medical military officer whose vigorous efforts stopped them at the barrier. He seems at one point to have shown weakness and given them leave to go on a little way up the road; and the little way seems to have carried them out of his sight and onward till they encountered the Colonel (or it may have been a General) in command. The Colonel (or the General) seems to have broken down very badly, for the car and Ursula Dearmer and the Commandant went on towards Termonde. Young Haynes was with them this time, and on the way they had picked up Mr. G. L—, War Correspondent to the *Daily Mail* and *Westminster*. They left the car behind somewhere in a safe place where the fire from the machine–guns couldn't reach it. There is a street or a road—I can't make out whether it is inside or outside the town; it leads straight to the bridge over the river, which is about as wide there as the Thames at Westminster. The bridge is the key to the position; it has been blown up and built again several times in the course of the War, and the Germans are now entrenched beyond it. The road had been raked by their *mitrailleuses* the day before.

It seems to have struck the four simultaneously that it would be quite a good thing to walk down this road on the off–chance of the machine–guns opening fire again. The tale told by the Commandant evokes an awful vision of them walking down it, four abreast, the Commandant and Mr. G. L— on the outside, fairly under shelter, and Ursula Dearmer and young Haynes a little in front of them down the middle, where the fire comes, when it does come. This spectacle seems to have shaken the Commandant in his view of bombarded towns as suitable places of amusement for young girls. Young Haynes ought to have known better. You tell him that as long as the world endures young Haynes will be young Haynes, and if there is danger in the middle of the road, it is there that he will walk by preference. And as no young woman of modern times is going to let herself be outdone by young Haynes, you must expect to find Ursula Dearmer in the middle of the road too. You cannot suppress this competitive heroism of young people. The roots strike too deep down in human nature. In the modern young man and woman competitive heroism has completely forgotten its origin and is now an end in itself.

And if it comes to that—how about Alost?

At the mention of Alost the Commandant's face becomes childlike again in its utter simplicity and innocence and candour. Alost was a very different thing. Looking for shells at Alost, you understand, was like looking for shells on the seashore. At Alost Ursula Dearmer was in no sort of danger. For at Alost she was under the Commandant's wing (young Haynes hasn't got any wings, only legs to walk into the line of fire on). He explains very carefully that he took her under his wing *because* she is a young girl and he feels responsible for her to her mother.

(Which, oddly enough, is just how *I* feel!)

As for young Haynes, I suppose he would plead that when he and Ursula Dearmer walked down the middle of the road there was no firing.

That seems to have been young Haynes's particular good fortune. I have now a perfect obsession of responsibility. I see, in one dreadful vision after another, the things that must

happen to Ursula Dearmer under the Commandant's wing, and to young Haynes and the Commandant under Ursula Dearmer's.

No wounded were found, this time, at Termonde.

This little *contretemps* with the Commandant has made me forget to record a far more notable event. Mrs. Torrence brought young Lieutenant G— in to luncheon. He is the hero of the Belgian Motor Cyclist Corps. He is said to have accounted for nine Germans with his own rifle in one morning. The Corps has already intimated that this is the first well–defined specimen of a man it has yet seen in Belgium. His dark–green uniform fits him exceedingly well. He is tall and handsome. Drenched in the glamour of the greatest possible danger, he gives it off like a subtle essence. As he was led in he had rather the air, the slightly awkward, puzzled and embarrassed air, of being on show as a fine specimen of a man. But it very soon wore off. In the absence of the Commandant he sat in the Commandant's place, so magnificent a figure that our mess, with gaps at every table, looked like a banquet given in his honour, a banquet whose guests had been decimated by some catastrophe.

Suddenly—whether it was the presence of the Lieutenant or the absence of the Commandant, or merely reaction from the strain of inactivity, I don't know, but suddenly madness came upon our mess. The mess–room was no longer a mess–room in a Military Hospital, but a British school–room. Mrs. Torrence had changed her woollen cap for a grey felt wide–awake. She was no longer an Arctic explorer, but the wild–western cowboy of British melodrama. She was the first to go mad. One moment she was seated decorously at the Lieutenant's right hand; the next she was strolling round the tables with an air of innocent abstraction, having armed herself in secret with the little hard round rolls supplied by order of the Commandant. Each little roll became a deadly *obus* in her hand. She turned. Her innocent abstraction was intense as she poised herself to aim.

With a shout of laughter Dr. Bird ducked behind the cover of his table–napkin.

I had a sudden memory of Mrs. Torrence in command of the party at Ostend, a figure of austere duty, of inexorable propriety, rigid with the discipline of the — Hospital, restraining the criminal levity of the Red Cross volunteer who would look or dream of looking at Ostend Cathedral. Mrs. Torrence, like a seven–year–old child meditating mischief, like a baby panther at play, like a very young and very engaging demon let loose, is looking at Dr. Bird. He is not a Cathedral, but he suffered bombardment all the same. She got his range with a roll. She landed her shell in the very centre of his waistcoat.

Her madness entered into Dr. Bird. He replied with a spirited fire which fell wide of her and battered the mess–room door. The orderlies retreated for shelter into the vestibule beyond. Jean was the first to penetrate the line of fire. Max followed him.

Madness entered into Max. He ceased to be a hospital orderly. He became Prosper Panne again, the very young *collégien*, as he put down his dishes and glided unobtrusively into the affair.

And then the young Belgian Lieutenant went mad. But he gave way by degrees. At first he sat up straight and stiff with polite astonishment before the spectacle of a British "rag." He paid the dubious tribute of a weak giggle to the bombardment of Dr. Bird. He was convulsed at the first performance of Prosper Panne. In his final collapse he was rocking to and fro and crowing with helpless, hysterical laughter.

For with the entrance of Prosper Panne the mess–room became a scene at the *Folies Bergères*. There was Mrs. Torrence, *première comédienne*, in the costume of a wild–western cowboy; there was the young Lieutenant himself, looking like a stage–lieutenant in the dark–

green uniform of the Belgian Motor Cyclist Corps; and there was Prosper Panne. He began by picking up Mrs. Torrence's brown leather motor glove with its huge gauntlet, and examining it with the deliciously foolish bewilderment of the accomplished clown. After one or two failures, brilliantly improvised, he fixed it firmly on his head. The huge gauntlet, with its limp five fingers dangling over his left ear, became a rakish képi with a five–pointed flap. Max—I mean Prosper Panne—wore it with an "*air impayable*." Out of his round, soft, putty–coloured face he made fifteen other faces in rapid succession, all incomparably absurd. He lit a cigarette and held it between his lower lip and his chin. The effect was of a miraculous transformation of those features, in which his upper lip disappeared altogether, his lower lip took on its functions, while his chin ceased to be a chin and became a lower lip. With this achievement Prosper Panne had his audience in the hollow of his hands. He could do what he liked with it. He did. He caused his motor–glove cap to fall from his head as if by some mysterious movement of its own. Then he went round the stalls and gravely and earnestly removed all our hats. With an air more and more "*impayable*" he wore each one of them in turn—the grey felt wide–awake of the wild–western cowboy, the knitted Jaeger head–gear of the little Arctic explorer, the dark–blue military cap with the red tassel assumed by Dr. Bird, even the green cap with the winged symbol of the young Belgian officer. By this time the young Belgian officer was so entirely the thrall of Prosper Panne that he didn't turn a hair.

Flushed with success, Max rose to his top–notch. Moving slowly towards the open door (centre) with his back to his audience and his head turned towards it over his left shoulder, by some extraordinary dislocation of his hip–joints, he achieved the immemorial salutation of the *Folies Bergères*—the last faint survival of the Old Athenian Comedy.

Up till now Jean had affected to ignore the performance of his colleague. But under this supreme provocation he yielded to the Aristophanic impulse, and—*exit* Max in the approved manner of the*Folies Bergères*.

* * * * *

It is all over. The young Belgian officer has flown away on his motor cycle to pot Germans; Mrs. Torrence has gone off to the field with the Colonel on the quest of the greatest possible danger. The Ambulance has followed them there.

I am in the mess–room, sitting at the disordered table and gazing at the ruins of our mess. I hear again the wild laughter of the mess–mates; it mingles with the cry of the refugees in the Palais des Fêtes: "*Une petite tranche de pain, s'il vous plaît, mademoiselle!*"

C'est triste, n'est–ce pas?

In the chair by the window Max lies back with his loose boyish legs extended limply in front of him; his round, close–cropped head droops to his shoulder, his round face (the face of a very young*collégien*) is white, the features are blurred and inert. Max is asleep with his dish–cloth in his hand, in the sudden, pathetic sleep of exhaustion. After his brief, funny madness, he is asleep. Jean comes and looks at him and shakes his head. You understand from Jean that Max goes mad like that now and then on purpose, so that he may forget in what manner his mother went mad.

We go quietly so as not to wake him a minute too soon, lest when he wakes he should remember.

There is a Taube hovering over Ghent.

Up there, in the clear blue sky it looks innocent, like an enormous greyish blond dragon–fly hovering over a pond. You stare at it, fascinated, as you stare at a hawk that hangs in mid–air, steadied by the vibration of its wings, watching its prey.

You are not in the least disturbed by the watching Taube. An aeroplane, dropping a few bombs, is nothing to what goes on down there where the ambulances are.

The ambulances have come back. I go out into the yard to look at them. They are not always nice to look at; the floors and steps would make you shudder if you were not past shuddering.

I have found something to do. Not much, but still something. I am to look after the linen for the ambulances, to take away the blood–stained pillow–slips and blankets, and deliver them at the laundry and get clean ones from the linen–room. It's odd, but I'm almost foolishly elated at being allowed to do this. We are still more or less weighed down by the sense of our uselessness. Even the Chaplain, though his services as a stretcher–bearer have been definitely recognized—even the Chaplain continues to suffer in this way. He has just come to me to tell me with pride that he is making a good job of the stretchers he has got to mend.

Then, just as I am beginning to lift up my head, the blow falls. Not one member of the Field Ambulance Corps is to be allowed to work at the Palais des Fêtes, for fear of bringing fever into the Military Hospital. And here we are, exactly where we were at the beginning of the week, Mrs. Lambert, Janet McNeil and I, three women out of five, with nothing to do and two convalescent orderlies waiting on us. If I could please myself I would tuck Max up in bed and wait on *him*.

In spite of the ambulance linen, this is the worst day of all for the wretched Secretary and Reporter. Five days in Ghent and not a thing done; not a line written of those brilliant articles (from the Front) which were to bring in money for the Corps. To have nothing to do but hang about the Hospital on the off–chance of the Commandant coming back unexpectedly and wanting a letter written; to pass the man with the bullet wound in his mouth a dozen times a day (he is getting very slowly better; his poor face was a little more human this morning); to see the maimed and crippled men trailing and hobbling about the hall, and the wounded carried in on their stretchers—dripping stretchers, agonized bodies, limbs rolled in bandages, blood oozing through the bandages, heads bound with bandages, bandages glued tight to the bone with blood—to see all this and be utterly powerless to help; to endure, day after day, the blank, blond horror of the empty mess–room; to sit before a marble–topped table with a bad pen, never enough paper and hardly any ink, and nothing at all to write about, while all the time the names of places, places you have not seen and never will see—Termonde, Alost, Quatrecht and Courtrai—go on sounding in your brain with a maddening, luring reiteration; to sit in a hateful inactivity, and a disgusting, an intolerable safety, and to be haunted by a vision of two figures, intensely clear on a somewhat vague background—Mrs. Torrence following her star of the greatest possible danger, and Ursula Dearmer wandering in youth and innocence among the shells; to be obliged to think of Ursula Dearmer's mother when you would much rather not think of her; to be profoundly and irrevocably angry with the guileless Commandant, whom at the moment you regard (it may be perversely) as the prime agent in this fatuous sacrifice of women's lives; to want to stop it and to be unable to stop it, and at the same time to feel a brute because you want to stop it—when *they* are enjoying the adventure—I can only say of the experience that I hope there is no depth of futility deeper than this to come. You might as well be taken prisoner by the Germans—better, since that would, at least, give you something to write about afterwards.

What's more, I'm bored.

When I told the Commandant all this he looked very straight at me and said, "Then you'd better come with us to Termonde." So straight he looked that the suggestion struck me less as a *bona fide* offer than an ironic reference to my five weeks' funk.

I don't tell him that that is precisely what I want to do. That his wretched Reporter nourishes an insane ambition—not to become a Special Correspondent; not to career under massive headlines in the columns of the *Daily Mail*; not to steal a march on other War Correspondents and secure the one glorious "scoop" of the campaign. Not any of these sickly and insignificant things. But—in defiance of Tom, the chauffeur—to go out with the Field Ambulance as an *ambulancière*, and hunt for wounded men, and in the intervals of hunting to observe the orbit of a shell and the manner of shrapnel in descending. To be left behind, every day, in an empty mess–room, with a bad pen, utterly deprived of copy or of any substitute for copy, and to have to construct war articles out of your inner consciousness, would be purgatory for a journalist. But to have a mad dream in your soul and a pair of breeches in your hold–all, and to see no possibility of "sporting" either, is the very refinement of hell. And your tortures will be unbearable if, at the same time, you have to hold your tongue about them and pretend that you are a genuine reporter and that all you want is copy and your utmost aim the business of the "scoop."

After a week of it you will not be likely to look with crystal clarity on other people's lapses from precaution.

But it would be absurd to tell him this. Ten to one he wouldn't believe it. He thinks I am funking all the time.

* * * * *

I am still very angry with him. He must know that I am very angry. I think that somewhere inside him he is rather angry too.

* * * * *

All the same he has come to me and asked me to give him my soap. He says Max has taken his.

I give him my soap, but—

These oppressions and obsessions, the deadly anxiety, the futile responsibility and the boredom are too much for me. I am thinking seriously of going home.

* * * * *

In the evening we—the Commandant and Janet McNeil and I—went down to the Hôtel de la Poste, to see the War Correspondents and hear the War news. Mr. G. L. and Mr. M. and Mr. P. were there. And there among them, to my astonishment, I found Mr. Davidson, the American sculptor.

The last time I saw Mr. Davidson it was in Mr. Joseph Simpson's studio, the one under mine in Edwardes Square. He was making a bust of Rabindranath Tagore; and as the great mystic poet disconcerted him by continually lapsing into meditation under this process, thereby emptying his beautiful face of all expression whatever, I had been called down from my studio to talk to him, so as to lure him, if possible, from meditation and keep his features in play. Mr. Davidson made a very fine bust of Rabindranath Tagore. And here he is, imperfectly disguised by the shortest of short beards, drawing caricatures of G. L.—G. L. explaining the plan of campaign to the Belgian General Staff; G. L. very straight and tall, the Belgian General Staff looking up to him with innocent, deferential faces, earnestly anxious to be taught. I am not more surprised at seeing Mr. Davidson here than he is at seeing me. In the world that makes war we have both entirely forgotten the world where people make busts and pictures and books. But we accept each other's presence. It is only a small part of the fantastic dislocation of war.

Nothing could be more different from the Flandria Palace Hotel, our Military Hospital, than the Hôtel de la Poste. It is packed with War Correspondents and Belgian officers. After the surgeons and the Red Cross nurses and their wounded, and the mysterious officials hanging about the porch and the hall, apparently doing nothing, after the English Ambulance and the melancholy inactivity of half its Corps, this place seems alive with a rich and virile life. It is full of live, exultant fighters, and of men who have their business not with the wounded and the dying but with live men and live things, and they have live words to tell about them. At least so it seems.

You listen with all your ears, and presently Termonde and Alost and Quatrecht and Courtrai cease to be mere names for you and become realities. It is as if you had been taken from your prison and had been let loose into the world again.

They are saying that there is no fighting at Saint Nicolas (the Commandant has been feeling about again for his visionary base hospital), but that the French troops are at Courtrai in great force. They have turned their left [?] wing round to the north–east and will probably sweep towards Brussels to cut off the German advance on Antwerp. The siege of Antwerp will then be raised. And a great battle will be fought outside Brussels, probably at Waterloo.

WATERLOO!

Mr. L. looks at you as much as to say that is what he has had up his sleeve all the time. The word comes from him as casually as if he spoke of the London and South–Western terminus. But he is alive to the power of its evocation, to the unsurpassable thrill. So are you. It starts the current in that wireless system of vibrations that travel unperishing, undiminished, from the dead to the living. There are not many kilometres between Ghent and Waterloo; you are not only within the radius of the psychic shock, you are close to the central batteries, and ninety–nine years are no more than one pulse of their vibration. Through I don't know how many kilometres and ninety–nine years it has tracked you down and found you in your one moment of response.

It has a sudden steadying effect. Your brain clears. The things that loomed so large, the "Flandria," and the English Field Ambulance and its miseries, and the terrifying recklessness of its Commandant, are reduced suddenly to invisibility. You can see nothing but the second Waterloo. You forget that you have ever been a prisoner in an Hotel–Hospital. You understand the mystic fascination of the road under your windows, going south–east from Ghent to Brussels, somewhere towards Waterloo. You are reconciled to the incomprehensible lassitude of events. That is what we have all been waiting for—the second Waterloo. And we have only waited five days.

I am certainly not going back to England.

The French troops are being massed at Courtrai.

Suddenly it strikes me that I have done an injustice to the Commandant. It is all very well to say that he brought me out here against my will. But did he? He said it would interest me to see the siege of Antwerp, and I said it wouldn't. I said with the most perfect sincerity that I'd die rather than go anywhere near the siege of Antwerp, or of any other place. And now the siege–guns from Namur are battering the forts of Antwerp, and down there the armies are gathering towards the second Waterloo, and the Commandant was right. I am extremely interested. I would die rather than go back to England.

Is it possible that he knew me better than I knew myself?

When I think that it is possible I feel a slight revulsion of justice towards the Commandant. After all, he brought me here. We may disagree about the present state of Alost and

Termonde, considered as health–resorts for English girls, but it is pretty certain that without him we would none of us have got here. Where, indeed, should we have been and how should we have got our motor ambulances, but for his intrepid handling of Providence and of the Belgian Red Cross and the Belgian Legation? There is genius in a man who can go out without one car, or the least little nut or cog of a *châssis* to his name, and impose himself upon a Government as the Commandant of a Motor Field Ambulance.

Still, though I am not going back to England as a protest, I *am* going to leave the Hospital Hotel for a little while. That bright idea has come to me just now while we are waiting for the Commandant to tear himself from the War Correspondents and come away. I shall get a room here in the Hôtel de la Poste for a week, and, while we wait for Waterloo, I shall write some articles. The War Correspondents will tell me what is being done, and what has been overdone and what remains to do. I shall at least hear things if I can't see them. And I shall cut the obsession of responsibility. It'll be worse than ever if there really is going to be a second Waterloo.

Waterloo with Ursula Dearmer and Janet in the thick of it, and Mrs. Torrence driving the Colonel's scouting–car!

There are moments of bitterness and distortion when I see the Commandant as a curious psychic monster bringing up his women with him to the siege–guns because of some uncanny satisfaction he finds in their presence there. There are moods, only less perverted, when I see him pursuing his course because it is his course, through sheer Highland Celtic obstinacy; lucid flashes when he appears, blinded by the glamour of his dream, and innocently regardless of actuality. Is it uncanniness? Is it obstinacy? Is it dreamy innocence? Or is it some gorgeous streak of Feminism? Is it the New Chivalry, that refuses to keep women back, even from the firing–line? The New Romance, that gives them their share of divine danger? Or, since nothing can be more absurd than to suppose that any person acts at all times and in all circumstances on one ground, or necessarily on any grounds, is it a little bit of all these things? I am not sure that Feminism, or at any rate the New Chivalry, doesn't presuppose them all.

The New Chivalry sees the point of its reporter's retirement to the Hôtel de la Poste, since it has decided that journalism is my work, and journalism cannot flourish at the "Flandria." So we interview the nice fat *propriétaire*, and the *propriétaire's* nice fat wife, and between them they find a room for me, a back room on the fourth floor, the only one vacant in the hotel; it looks out on the white–tiled walls and the windows of the enclosing wings. The space shut in is deep and narrow as a well. The view from that room is more like a prison than any view from the "Flandria," but I take it. I am not deceived by appearances, and I recognize that the peace of God is there.

It is a relief to think that poor Max will have one less to work for.

At the "Flandria" we find that the Military Power has put its foot down. The General—he cannot have a spark of the New Chivalry in his brutal breast—has ordered Mrs. Torrence off her chauffeur's job. You see the grizzled Colonel as the image of protest and desolation, helpless in the hands of the implacable Power. You are sorry for Mrs. Torrence (she has seen practically no service with the ambulance as yet), but she, at any rate, has had her fling. No power can take from her the memory of those two days.

Still, something is going to be done to–morrow, and this time, even the miserable Reporter is to have a look in. The Commandant has another scheme for a temporary hospital or a dressing–station or something, and to–morrow he is going with Car 1 to Courtrai to reconnoitre for a position and incidentally to see the French troops. A God–sent opportunity

for the Reporter; and Janet McNeil is going, too. We are to get up at six o’clock in the morning and start before seven.

Friday, October 2nd

We get up at six.

We hang about till eight–thirty or nine. A fine rain begins to fall. An ominous rain. Car 1 and Car 2 are drawn up at the far end of the Hospital yard. The rain falls ominously over the yellow–brown, trodden clay of the yard. There is an ominous look of preparation about the cars. There is also an ominous light in the blue eyes of the chauffeur Tom.

The chauffeur Tom appears as one inspired by hatred of the whole human race. You would say that he was also hostile to the entire female sex. For Woman in her right place he may, he probably does, feel tenderness and reverence. Woman in a field ambulance he despises and abhors. I really think it was the sight of us that accounted for his depression at Ostend. I have gathered from Mrs. Torrence that the chauffeur Tom has none of the New Chivalry about him. He is the mean and brutal male, the crass obstructionist who grudges women their laurels in the equal field.

I know the dreadful, blasphemous and abominable things that Tom is probably thinking about me as I climb on to his car. He is visibly disgusted with his orders. That he, a Red Cross Field Ambulance chauffeur, should be told to drive four—or is it all five?—women to look at the massing of the French troops at Courtrai! He is not deceived by the specious pretext of the temporary hospital. Hospitals be blowed. It's a bloomin' joy–ride, with about as much Red Cross in it as there is in my hat. He is glad that it is raining.

Yes, I know what Tom is thinking. And all the time I have a sneaking sympathy with Tom. I want to go to Courtrai more than I ever wanted anything in my life, but I see the expedition plainly from Tom's point of view. A field ambulance is a field ambulance and not a motor touring car.

And to–day Tom is justified. We have hardly got upon his car than we were told to get off it. We are not going to Courtrai. We are not going anywhere. From somewhere in those mysterious regions where it abides, the Military Power has come down.

Even as I get off the car and return to the Hospital–prison, in melancholy retreat over the yellow–brown clay of the yard, through the rain, I acknowledge the essential righteousness of the point of view. And, to the everlasting honour of the Old Chivalry, it should be stated that the chauffeur Tom repressed all open and visible expression of his joy.

The morning passes, as the other mornings passed, in unspeakable inactivity. Except that I make up the accounts and hand them over to Mr. Grierson. It seems incredible, but I have balanced them to the last franc.

I pack. Am surprised in packing by Max and Jean. They both want to know the reason why. This is the terrible part of the business—leaving Max and Jean.

I try to explain. Prosper Panne, who "writes for the Paris papers," understands me. He can see that the Hôtel de la Poste may be a better base for an attack upon the London papers. But Max does not understand. He perceives that I have a scruple about occupying my room. And he takes me into *his* room to show me how nice it is—every bit as good as mine. The implication being that if the Hospital can afford to lodge one of its orderlies so well, it can perfectly well afford to lodge me. (This is one of the prettiest things that Max has done yet! As long as I live I shall see him standing in his room and showing me how nice it is.)

Still you can always appeal from Max to Prosper Panne. He understands these journalistic tempers and caprices. He knows on how thin a thread an article can hang. We have a brief discussion on the comparative difficulties of the *roman* and the *conte*, and he promises me to cherish and protect the hat I must leave behind me as if it were his bride.

But Jean—Jean does not understand at all. He thinks that I am not satisfied with the service of our incomparable mess; that I prefer the flesh–pots of the "Poste" and the manners of its waiters. He has no other thought but this, and it is abominable; it is the worst of all. The explanation thickens. I struggle gloriously with the French language; one moment it has me by the throat and I am strangled; the next I writhe forth triumphant. Strange gestures are given to me; I plunge into the darkest pits of memory for the words that have escaped me; I find them (or others just as good); it is really quite easy to say that I am coming back again in a week.

Interview with Madame F. and M. G., the President.

Interview with the Commandant. Final assault on the defences of the New Chivalry (the Commandant's mind is an impregnable fortress).

And, by way of afterthought, I inquire whether, in the event of a sudden scoot before the Germans, a reporter quartered at the Hôtel de la Poste will be cut off from the base of communications and left to his or her ingenuity in flight?

The Commandant, vague and imperturbable, replies that in all probability it will be so.

And I (if possible more imperturbable than he) observe that the War Correspondents will make quite a nice flying–party.

In a little open carriage—the taxis have long ago all gone to the War—in an absurd little open carriage, exactly like a Cheltenham "rat," I depart like a lady of Cheltenham, for the Hôtel de la Poste. The appearance and the odour of this little carriage give you an odd sense of security and peace. The Germans may be advancing on Ghent at this moment, but for all the taste of war there is in it, you might be that lady, going from one hotel to the other, down the Cheltenham Promenade.

The further you go from the Military Hospital and the Railway Station the more it is so. The War does not seem yet to have shaken the essential peace of the *bourgeois* city. The Hôtel de la Poste is in the old quarter of the town, where the Cathedrals are. Instead of the long, black railway lines and the red–brick façade of the Station and Post Office; instead of the wooded fields beyond and the white street that leads to the battle–places south and east; instead of the great Square with its mustering troops and swarms of refugees, you have the quiet Place d'Armes, shut in by trees, and all round it are the hotels and cafés where the officers and the War Correspondents come and go. Through all that coming and going you get the sense of the old foreign town that was dreaming yesterday. People are sitting outside the restaurants all round the Place, drinking coffee and liqueurs as if nothing had happened, as if Antwerp were far–off in another country, and as if it were still yesterday. Mosquitoes come up from the drowsy canal water and swarm into the hotels and bite you. I found any number of mosquitoes clinging drowsily to my bedroom walls.

But there are very few women among those crowds outside the restaurants. There are not many women except refugees in the streets, and fewer still in the shops.

I have blundered across a little café with an affectionately smiling and reassuringly fat proprietress, where they give you *brioches* and China tea, which, as it were in sheer affection, they call English. It is not as happy a find as you might think. It is not, in the circumstances, happy at all. In fact, if you have never known what melancholy is and would like to know it, I

can recommend two courses. Go down the Grand Canal in Venice in the grey spring of the year, in a gondola, all by yourself. Or get mixed up with a field ambulance which is not only doing noble work but running thrilling risks, in neither of which you have a share, or the ghost of a chance of a share; cut yourself off from your comrades, if it is only for a week, and go into a Belgian café in war–time and try to eat *brioches* and drink English tea all by yourself. This is the more successful course. You may see hope beyond the gondola and the Grand Canal. But you will see no hope beyond the *brioche* and the English tea.

I walk about again till it is time to go back to the Hotel. So far, my emancipation has not been agreeable.

Evening. Hôtel De La Poste

I dined in the crowded restaurant, avoiding the War Correspondents, choosing a table where I hoped I might be unobserved. Somewhere through a glass screen I caught a sight of Mr. L.'s head. I was careful to avoid the glass screen and Mr. L.'s head. He shall not say, if I can possibly help it, that I am an infernal nuisance. For I know I haven't any business to be here, and if Belgium had a Kitchener I shouldn't be here. However you look at me, I am here on false pretences. In the eyes of Mr. L. I would have no more right to be a War Correspondent (if I were one) than I have to be on a field ambulance. It is with the game of war as it was with the game of football I used to play with my big brothers in the garden. The women may play it if they're fit enough, up to a certain point, very much as I played football in the garden. The big brothers let their little sister kick off; they let her run away with the ball; they stood back and let her make goal after goal; but when it came to the scrimmage they took hold of her and gently but firmly moved her to one side. If she persisted she became an infernal nuisance. And if those big brothers over there only knew what I was after they would make arrangements for my immediate removal from the seat of war.

The Commandant has turned up with Ursula Dearmer. He is drawn to these War Correspondents who appear to know more than he does. On the other hand, an ambulance that can get into the firing–line has an irresistible attraction for a War Correspondent. It may at any moment constitute his only means of getting there himself.

One of our cars has been sent out to Antwerp with dispatches and surgical appliances.

The sight of the Commandant reminds me that I have got all the funds of the Ambulance upstairs in my suit–case in that leather purse–belt—and if the Ambulance does fly from Ghent without me, and without that belt, it will find itself in considerable embarrassment before it has retreated very far.

It is quite certain that I shall have to take my chance. I have asked the Commandant again (either this evening or earlier) so that there may be no possible doubt about it: "If we do have to scoot from Ghent in a hurry I shall have nothing but my wits to trust to?"

And he says, "True for you."

And he looks as if he meant it.[4]

These remarkable words have a remarkable effect on the new War Correspondent. It is as if the coolness and the courage and the strength of a hundred War Correspondents and of fifty Red Cross Ambulances had been suddenly discharged into my soul. This absurd accession of

[4] He didn't. People never do mean these things.

power and valour[5] is accompanied by a sudden immense lucidity. It is as if my soul had never really belonged to me until now, as if it had been either drugged or drunk and had never known what it was to be sober until now. The sensation is distinctly agreeable. And on the top of it all there is a peace which I distinctly recognize as the peace of God.

So, while the Commandant talks to the War Correspondents as if nothing had happened, I go upstairs and unlock my suit–case and take from it the leather purse–belt with the Ambulance funds in it, and I bring it to the Commandant and lay it before him and compel him to put it on. As I do this I feel considerable compunction, as if I were launching a three–year–old child in a cockle–shell on the perilous ocean of finance. I remind him that fifteen pounds of the money in the belt is his (he would be as likely as not to forget it). As for the accounts, they are so clear that a three–year–old child could understand them. I notice with a diabolical satisfaction which persists through the all–pervading peace by no means as incongruously as you might imagine—I notice particularly that the Commandant doesn't like this part of it a bit. There is not anybody in the Corps who wants to be responsible for its funds or enjoys wearing that belt. But it is obvious that if the Ambulance can bear to be separated from its Treasurer–Secretary–Reporter, in the flight from Ghent, it cannot possibly bear to be separated from its funds.

I am alone with the Commandant while this happens, standing by one of the writing–tables in the lounge. Ursula Dearmer (she grows more mature every day) and the War Correspondents and a few Generals have melted somewhere into the background. The long, lithe pigskin belt lies between us on the table—between my friend and me—like a pale snake. It exerts some malign and poisonous influence. It makes me say things, things that I should not have thought it possible to say. And it is all about the shells at Alost.

He is astonished.

And I do not care.

I am sustained, exalted by that sense of righteousness you feel when you are insanely pounding somebody who thinks that in perfect sanity and integrity he has pounded you.

[5] This only means that, whether you attended to it or not (you generally didn't), as long as you were in Belgium, your sub–consciousness was never entirely free from the fear of Uhlans—of Uhlans in the flesh. The illusion of valour is the natural, healthy reaction of your psyche against its fear and your indifference to its fear.

Saturday, 3rd

Mr. L. asked me to breakfast. He has told me more about the Corps in five minutes than the Corps has been able to tell me in as many days. He has seen it at Alost and Termonde. You gather that he has seen other heroic enterprises also and that he would perjure himself if he swore that they were indispensable. Every Correspondent is besieged by the leaders of heroic enterprises, and I imagine that Mr. L. has been "had" before now by amateurs of the Red Cross, and his heart must have sunk when he heard of an English Field Ambulance in Ghent. And he owns to positive terror when he saw it, with its girls in breeches, its Commandant in Norfolk jacket, grey knickerbockers, heather–mixture stockings and deer–stalker; its Chaplain in khaki, and its Surgeon a mark for bullets in his Belgian officer's cap. I suggest that this absence of uniform only proves our passionate eagerness to be off and get to work. But it is right. Our ambulance is the real thing, and Mr. L. is going to be an angel and help it all he can. He will write about it in the *Illustrated London News* and the *Westminster*. When he hears that I came out here to write about the War and make a little money for the Field Ambulance, and that I haven't seen anything of the War and that my invasion of his hotel is simply a last despairing effort to at least hear something, he is more angelic than ever. He causes a whole cinema of war–scenes to pass before my eyes. When I ask if there is anything left for me to "do," he evokes a long procession of articles—pure, virgin copy on which no journalist has ever laid his hands—and assures me that it is mine, that the things that have been done are nothing to the things that are left to do. I tell him that I have no business on his pitch, and that I am horribly afraid of getting in the regular Correspondents' way and spoiling their game; as I am likely to play it, there isn't any pitch. Of course, I suppose, there is the "scoop," but that's another matter. It is the War Correspondent's crown of cunning and of valour, and nobody can take from him that crown. But in the psychology of the thing, every Correspondent is his own pitch. He has told me very nearly all the things I want to know, among them what the Belgian General said to the Commandant when he saw Ursula Dearmer at Alost:

"What the devil is the lady doing there?"

I gather that Mr. L. shares the General's wonder and my own anxiety. I am not far wrong in regarding Alost and Termonde as no fit place for Ursula Dearmer or any other woman.

Answered the Commandant's letters for him. Wrote to Ezra Pound. Wrote out the report for the last three days' ambulance work and sent it to the British Red Cross; also a letter to Mr. Rogers about a light scouting–car. The British Red Cross has written that it cannot spare any more motor ambulances, but it may possibly send out a small car. (The Commandant has cabled to Mr. Gould, of Gould Bros., Exeter, accepting his offer of his own car and services.)

Went down to the "Flandria" for news of the Ambulance. The car that was sent out yesterday evening got through all right to Antwerp and returned safely. It has brought very bad news. Two of the outer forts are said to have fallen. The position is critical, and grave anxiety is felt for the safety of the English in Antwerp. Mrs. St. Clair Stobart has asked us for one of our ambulances. But even if we could spare it we cannot give it up without an order from the military authority at Ghent. We hear that Dr. —, one of Mrs. Stobart's women, is to leave Antwerp and work at our hospital. She is engaged to be married to Dr. —, and the poor boy is somewhat concerned for her safety. I'm very glad I have left the "Flandria," for she can have my room.

I wish they would make Miss — come away too.

Yes: Miss —, that clever novelist, who passes for a woman of the world because she uses mundane appearances to hide herself from the world's importunity—Miss — is here. The War caught her. Some people were surprised. I wasn't.[6]

* * * * *

Walked through the town again—old quarter. Walked and walked and walked, thinking about Antwerp all the time. Through streets of grey–white and lavender–tinted houses, with very fragile balconies. Saw the two Cathedrals[7] and the Town Hall—refugees swarming round it—and the Rab—I can't remember its name: see Baedeker—with its turrets and its moat. Any amount of time to see cathedrals in and no Mrs. Torrence to protest. I wonder how much of all this will be left by next month, or even by next week? Two of the Antwerp forts have fallen. They say the occupation of Ghent will be peaceful; while of Antwerp I suppose they would say, "*C'est triste, n'est–ce pas?*" They say the Germans will just march into Ghent and march out again, commandeering a few things here and there. But nobody knows, and by the stolid faces of these civilians you might imagine that nobody cares. Certainly none of them think that the fate of Antwerp can be the fate of Ghent.

And the faces of the soldiers, of the men who know? They are the faces of important people, cheerful people, pleasantly preoccupied with the business in hand. Only here and there a grave face, a fixed, drawn face, a face twisted with the irritation of the strain.

Why, the very refugees have the look of a rather tired tourist–party, wandering about, seeing Ghent, seeing the Cathedral.

Only they aren't looking at the Cathedral. They are looking straight ahead, across the *Place*, up the street; they do not see or hear the trams swinging down on them, or the tearing, snorting motors; they stroll abstractedly into the line of the motors and stand there; they start and scatter, wild–eyed, with a sudden recrudescence of the terror that has driven them here from their villages in the fields.

* * * * *

It seems incredible that I should be free to walk about like this. It is as if I had cut the rope that tied me to a soaring air–balloon and found myself, with firm feet, safe on the solid earth. Any bit of earth, even surrounded by Germans, seems safe compared with the asphyxiation of that ascent. And when the air–balloon wasn't going up it was as if I had lain stifling under a soft feather–bed for more than a year. Now I've waked up suddenly and flung the feather–bed off with a vigorous kick.

[6] Nobody need have been surprised. She had distinguished herself in other wars.
[7] One is a church and not a cathedral.

Sunday, 4th

I am puzzled about this date. It stands in my ambulance Day–Book as Saturday, 3rd, with a note that the British came into Ghent on their way to Antwerp on the evening of that day. Now I believe there were no British in Antwerp before the evening of Sunday, the 4th, yet "Dr. Wilson" and Mr. Davidson, going into Saint Nicolas before us, saw the British there, and "Mrs. Torrence" and "Janet McNeil" saw more British come into Ghent in the evening. I was ill with fever the day after the run into Antwerp, and got behindhand with my Day–Book. So it seems safest to assume that I made a wrong entry and that we went into Antwerp on Sunday, and to record Saturday's events as spreading over the whole day. Similarly the events that the Day–Book attributes to Monday must have belonged to Tuesday. And if Tuesday's events were really Wednesday's, that clears up a painful doubt I had as to Wednesday, which came into my Day–Book as an empty extra which I couldn't account for in any way. There I was with a day left over and nothing to put into it. And yet Wednesday, the 7th, was the first day of the real siege of Antwerp. On Thursday, the 8th, I started clear.

(I have no clear recollection of Sunday morning, because in the afternoon we went to Antwerp; and Antwerp has blotted out everything that went near before it.)

The Ambulance has been ordered to take two Belgian professors (or else they are doctors) into Antwerp. There isn't any question this time of carrying wounded. It seems incredible, but I am going too. I shall see the siege of Antwerp and hear the guns that were brought up from Namur.

Somewhere, on the north–west horizon, a vision, heavenly, but impalpable, aerial, indistinct, of the Greatest Possible Danger.

I am glad I am going. But the odd thing is that there is no excitement about it. It seems an entirely fit and natural thing that the vision should materialize, that I should see the shells battering the forts of Antwerp and hear the big siege–guns from Namur. For all its incredibility, the adventure lacks every element of surprise. It is simply what I came out for. For here in Belgium the really incredible things are the things that existed and happened before the War. They existed and happened a hundred years ago and the memory of them is indistinct; the feeling of them is gone. You have ceased to have any personal interest in them; if they happened at all they happened to somebody else. What is happening now has been happening always. All your past is soaking in the vivid dye of these days, and what you are now you have been always. I have been a War Correspondent all my life—*blasée* with battles. The Commandant orders me into the front seat beside the chauffeur Tom, so that I may see things. Even Tom's face cannot shake me in my conviction that I am merely setting out once more on my usual, legitimate, daily job.

It is all so natural that you do not wonder in the least at this really very singular extension of your personality. You are not aware of your personality at all. If you could be you would see it undergoing shrinkage. It is, anyhow, one of the things that ceased to matter a hundred years ago. If you could examine its contents at this moment you would find nothing there but that shining vision of danger, the siege of Antwerp, indistinct, impalpable, aerial.

Presently the vision itself shrinks and disappears on the north–west horizon. The car has shot beyond the streets into the open road, the great paved highway to Antwerp, and I am absorbed in other matters: in Car 1 and in the chauffeur Tom, who is letting her rip more and more into her top speed with every mile; in M. C—, the Belgian Red Cross guide, beside me on my left, and in the Belgian soldier sitting on the floor at his feet. The soldier is confiding some fearful secret to M. C— about somebody called Achille. M. C— bends very low to

catch the name, as if he were trying to intercept and conceal it, and when he *has* caught it he assumes an air of superb mystery and gravity and importance. With one gesture he buries the name of Achille in his breast under his uniform. You know that he would die rather than betray the secret of Achille. You decide that Achille is the heroic bearer of dispatches, and that we have secret orders to pick him up somewhere and convey him in safety to Antwerp. You do not grasp the meaning of this pantomime until the third sentry has approached us, and M. C— has stopped for the third time to whisper "Ach–ille!" behind the cover of his hand, and the third sentry is instantly appeased.

(Concerning sentries, you learn that the Belgian kind is amiable, but that the French sentry is a terrible fellow, who will think nothing of shooting you if your car doesn't stop dead the instant he levels his rifle.)

Except for sentries and straggling troops and the long trains of refugees, the country is as peaceful between Ghent and Saint Nicolas as it was last week between Ostend and Ghent. It is the same adorable Flemish country, the same flat fields, the same paved causeway and the same tall, slender avenues of trees. But if anything could make the desolation of Belgium more desolate it is this intolerable beauty of slender trees and infinite flat land, the beauty of a country formed for the very expression of peace. In the vivid gold and green of its autumn it has become a stage dressed with ironic splendour for the spectacle of a people in flight. Half the population of Antwerp and the country round it is pouring into Ghent.[8] First the automobiles, Belgian officers in uniform packed tight between women and children and their bundles, convoying the train. Then the carriages secured by the *bourgeois* (they are very few); then men and boys on bicycles; then the carts, and with the coming on of the carts the spectacle grows incredible, fantastic. You see a thing advancing like a house on wheels. It is a tall hay–wagon—the tallest wagon you have ever seen in your life—piled with household furniture and mattresses on the top of the furniture, and on top of the mattresses, on the roof, as it were, a family of women and children and young girls. Some of them seem conscious of the stupendous absurdity of this appearance; they smile at you or laugh as the structure goes towering and toppling by.

Next, low on the ground, enormous and grotesque bundles, endowed with movement and with legs. Only when you come up to them do you see that they are borne on the bowed backs of men and women and children. The children—when there are no bundles to be borne these carry a bird in a cage, or a dog, a dog that sits in their arms like a baby and is pressed tight to their breasts. Here and there men and women driving their cattle before them, driving them gently, without haste, with a great dignity and patience.

These, for all the panic and ruin in their bearing, might be pilgrims or suppliants, or the servants of some religious rite, bringing the votive offerings and the sacrificial beasts. The infinite land and the avenues of slender trees persuade you that it is so.

And wherever the ambulance cars go they meet endless processions of refugees; endless, for the straight, flat Flemish roads are endless, and as far as your eye can see the stream of people is unbroken; endless, because the misery of Belgium is endless; the mind cannot grasp it or take it in. You cannot meet it with grief, hardly with conscious pity; you have no tears for it; it is a sorrow that transcends everything you have known of sorrow. These people have been left "only their eyes to weep with." But they do not weep any more than you do. They have

[8] It wasn't. This was only the first slender trickling. The flood came three days later with the bombardment of the city.

no tears for themselves or for each other.[9] This is the terrible thing, this and the manner of their flight. It is not flight, it is the vast, unhasting and unending movement of a people crushed down by grief and weariness, pushed on by its own weight, by the ceaseless impact of its ruin.

This stream is the main stream from Antwerp, swollen by its tributaries. It doesn't seem to matter where it comes from, its strength and volume always seem the same. After the siege of Antwerp it will thicken and flow from some other direction, that is all. And all the streams seem to flow into Ghent and to meet in the Palais des Fêtes.[10]

I forget whether it was near Lokeren or Saint Nicolas that we saw the first sign of fighting, in houses levelled to the ground to make way for the artillery fire; levelled, and raked into neat plots without the semblance of a site.

After the refugees, the troops. Village streets crowded with military automobiles and trains of baggage wagons and regiments of infantry. Little villas with desolate, surprised and innocent faces, standing back in their gardens; soldiers sitting in their porches and verandahs, soldiers' faces looking out of their windows; soldiers are quartered in every room, and the grass grows high in their gardens. Soldiers run down the garden paths to look at our ambulance as it goes by.

There is excitement in the village streets.

At Saint Nicolas we overtake Dr. Wilson and Mr. Davidson walking into Antwerp. They tell us the news.

The British troops have come. At last. They have been through before us on their way to Antwerp. Dr. Wilson and Mr. Davidson have seen the British troops. They have talked to them.

Mr. Davidson cannot conceal his glee at getting in before the War Correspondents. Pure luck has given into his hands *the* great journalistic scoop of the War in Belgium. And he is not a journalist. He is a sculptor out for the busts of warriors, and for actuality in those tragic and splendid figures that are grouped round memorial columns, for the living attitude and gesture.

We take up Mr. Davidson and Dr. Wilson, and leave one of our professors (if he is a professor) at Saint Nicolas, for the poor man has come without his passport. He will have to hang about at Saint Nicolas, doing nothing, until such time as it pleases Heaven to send us back from Antwerp. He resigns himself, and we abandon him, a piteous figure wrapped in a brown shawl.

After Saint Nicolas more troops, a few batteries of artillery, some infantry, long, long regiments of Belgian cavalry, coming to the defence of the country outside Antwerp. Cavalry halting at a fork of the road by a little fir–wood. A road that is rather like the road just outside Wareham as you go towards Poole. More troops. And after the troops an interminable procession of labourers trudging on foot. At a distance you take them for refugees, until you see that they are carrying poles and spades. Presently the road cuts through the circle of stakes and barbed wire entanglements set for the German cavalry. And somewhere on our left (whether before or after Saint Nicolas I cannot remember), across a field, the rail embankment ran parallel with our field, and we saw the long ambulance train, flying the Red

[9] Of all the thousands and thousands of refugees whom I have seen I have only seen three weep, and they were three out of six hundred who had just disembarked at the Prince of Wales's Pier at Dover. But in Belgium not one tear.

[10] This is all wrong. The main stream went as straight as it could for the sea–coast—Holland or Ostend.

Cross and loaded with wounded, on its way from Antwerp to Ghent. At this point the line is exposed conspicuously, and we must have been well within range of the German fire, for the next ambulance train—but we didn't know about the next ambulance train till afterwards.

After the circle of the stakes and wire entanglements you begin to think of the bombardment. You strain your ears for the sound of the siege–guns from Namur. Somewhere ahead of us on the horizon there is Antwerp. Towers and tall chimneys in a very grey distance. Every minute you look for the flight of the shells across the grey and the fall of a tower or a chimney. But the grey is utterly peaceful and the towers and the tall chimneys remain. And at last you turn in a righteous indignation and say: "Where is the bombardment?"

The bombardment is at the outer forts.

And where are the forts, then? (You see no forts.)

The outer forts? Oh, the outer forts are thirty kilometres away.

No. Not there. To your right.

And you, who thought you would have died rather than see the siege of Antwerp, are dumb with disgust. Your heart swells with a holy and incorruptible resentment of the sheer levity of the Commandant.

A pretty thing—to bring a War Correspondent out to see a bombardment when there isn't any bombardment, or when all there ever was is a hundred—well then, *thirty* kilometres away.[11]

It was twilight as we came into Antwerp. We approached it by the west, by the way of the sea, by the great bridge of boats over the Scheldt. The sea and the dykes are the defence of Antwerp on this side. Whole regiments of troops are crossing the bridge of boats. Our car crawls by inches at a time. It is jammed tight among some baggage wagons. It disentangles itself with difficulty from the baggage wagons, and is wedged tighter still among the troops. But the troops are moving, though by inches at a time. We get our front wheels on to the bridge. Packed in among the troops, but moving steadily as they move, we cross the Scheldt. On our right the sharp bows and on our left the blunt sterns of the boats. Boat after boat pressed close, gunwale to gunwale, our roadway goes across their breasts. Their breasts are taut as the breasts of gymnasts under the tramping of the regiments. They vibrate like the breasts of living things as they bear us up.

No heaving of any beautiful and beloved ship, no crossing of any sea, no sight of any city that has the sea at her feet, not New York City nor Venice, no coming into any foreign land, ever thrilled me as that coming into Antwerp with the Belgian army over that bridge of boats.

At twilight, from the river, with its lamps lit and all its waters shining, Antwerp looked beautiful as Venice and as safe and still. For the dykes are her defences on this side. But for the trudging regiments you would not have guessed that on the land side the outer ramparts were being shelled incessantly.

It was a struggle up the slope from the river bank to the quay, a struggle in which we engaged with commissariat and ammunition wagons and troops and refugees in carts, all trying to get away from the city over the bridge of boats. The ascent was so steep and slippery that you felt as though at any moment the car might hurl itself down backwards on the top of the processions struggling behind it.

[11] The outer forts were twelve miles away.

At last we landed. I have no vivid recollection[12] of our passage through the town. Except that I know we actually were in Antwerp I could not say whether I really saw certain winding streets and old houses with steep gables or whether I dreamed them. There was one great street of white houses and gilded signs that stood shimmering somewhere in the twilight; but I cannot tell you what street it was. And there were some modern boulevards, and the whole place was very silent. It had the silence and half darkness of dreams, and the beauty and magic and sinister sadness of dreams. And in that silence and sadness our car, with its backings and turnings and its snorts, and our own voices as we asked our way (for we were more or less lost in Antwerp) seemed to be making an appalling and inappropriate and impious noise.

Antwerp seems to me to have been all hospitals, though I only saw two, or perhaps three. One was in an ordinary house in a street, and I think this must have been the British Field Hospital; for Mrs. Winterbottom was there. And of all the women I met thus casually "at the front" she was, by a long way, the most attractive. We went into one or two of the wards; in others, where the cases were very serious, we were only allowed to stand for a second in the doorway; there were others again which we could not see at all.

I think, unless I am rolling two hospitals into one, that we saw a second—the English Hospital. It was for the English Hospital that we heard the Commandant inquire perpetually as we made our way through the strange streets and the boulevards beyond them, following at his own furious pace, losing him in byways and finding him by some miracle again. Talk of dreams! Our progress through Antwerp was like one of those nightmares which have no form or substance but are made up of ghastly twilight and hopeless quest and ever–accelerating speed. It was not till it was all over that we knew the reason for his excessive haste.

When we got to Mrs. St. Clair Stobart's Hospital—in a garden, planted somewhere away beyond the boulevards in an open place—we had hardly any time to look at it. All the same, I shall never forget that Hospital as long as I live. It had been a concert–hall[13] and was built principally of glass and iron; at any rate, if it was not really the greenhouse that it seemed to be there was a great deal of glass about it, and it had been shelled by aeroplane the night before. No great damage had been done, but the sound and the shock had terrified the wounded in their beds. This hospital, as everybody knows, is run entirely by women, with women doctors, women surgeons, women orderlies. Mrs. St. Clair Stobart and some of her gallant staff came out to meet us on a big verandah in front of this fantastic building, she and her orderlies in the uniform of the British Red Cross, her surgeons in long white linen coats over their skirts. Dr. ― whom we are to take back with us to Ghent, was there.

We asked for Miss ―, and she came to us finally in a small room adjoining what must have been the restaurant of the concert–hall.

I was shocked at her appearance. She was quieter than ever and her face was grey and worn with watching. She looked as if she could not have held out another night.

She told us about last night's bombardment. The effect of it on this absurd greenhouse must have been terrific. Every day they are expecting the bombardment of the town.

[12] At the time of writing—February 19th, 1915. My Day–Book gives no record of anything but the hospitals we visited.

[13] There must be something wrong here, for the place was, I believe, a convent.

No, none of them are leaving except two. Every woman will stick to her post[14] till the order comes to evacuate the hospital, and then not one will quit till the last wounded man is carried to the transport.

It seems that Miss — is a hospital orderly, and that her duty is to stand at the gate of the garden with a lantern as the ambulances come in and to light them to the door of the hospital, and then to see that each man has the number of his cot pinned to the breast of his sleeping–jacket.

Mrs. Stobart, very properly, will have none but trained women in her hospital. But even an untrained woman is equal to holding a lantern and pinning on tickets, so I implored Miss — to let me take her place while she went back to rest in my room at Ghent, if it was only for one night. I used every argument I could think of, and for one second I thought the best argument had prevailed. But it was only for a second. Probably not even for a second. Miss — may drop to pieces at her post, but it is there that she will drop.

Outside on the verandah the Commandant was fairly ramping to be off. No—I can't see the Hospital. There isn't any time to see the Hospital. But Miss — could not bear me not to see it, and together we made a surreptitious bolt for it, and I did see the Hospital.

It was not like any hospital you had ever seen before. Except that the wounded were all comfortably bedded, it was more like the sleeping–hall of the Palais des Fêtes. The floor of the great concert–hall was covered with mattresses and beds, where the wounded lay about in every attitude of suffering. No doubt everything was in the most perfect order, and the nurses and doctors knew how to thread their way through it all, but to the hurried spectator in the doorway the effect was one of the most *macabre* confusion. Only one object stood out—the large naked back of a Belgian soldier, who sat on the edge of his bed waiting to be washed. He must have been really the most cheerful and (comparatively) uninjured figure in the whole crowd, but he seemed the most pitiful, because of the sheer human insistence of his pathetic back.

Over this back and over all that prostrate agony the enormous floriated bronze rings that carried the lights of the concert–hall hung from the ceiling in frightful, festive decoration.

Miss — whispered: "One of them is dying. We can't save him."

She seemed to regard this one as a positive slur on their record. I thought: "Only one—among all that crowd!"

Mrs. Stobart came after us in some alarm as we ran down the garden.

"What are you doing with Miss —? You're not going to carry her off?"

"No," I said, "we're not. She won't come."

But we have got off with Dr. —.

Mrs. Stobart has refused the Commandant's offer of one of our best surgeons in exchange. He is a man. And this hospital is a Feminist Show.

We dined in a great hurry in a big restaurant in one of the main streets. The restaurant was nearly empty and funereal black cloths were hung over the windows to obscure the lights.

Mr. Davidson (this cheerful presence was with us in our dream–like career through Antwerp)—Mr. Davidson and I amused ourselves by planning how we will behave when we are taken prisoner by the Germans. He is safe, because he is an American citizen. The

[14] Every woman did.

unfortunate thing about me is my passport, otherwise, by means of a well–simulated nasal twang I might get through as an American novelist. I've been mistaken for one often enough in my own country. But, as I don't mean to be taken prisoner, and perhaps murdered or have my hands chopped off, without a struggle, my plan is to deliver a speech in German, as follows: "*Ich bin eine berühmte Schriftstellerin*" (on these occasions you stick at nothing), "*berühmt in England, aber viel berühmter in den Vereinigten Staaten, und mein Schicksal will den Presidenten Wilson nicht gleichgültig sein*." I added by way of rhetorical flourish as the language went to my head: "*Er will mein Tod zu vertheidigen gut wissen*;" but I was aware that this was overdoing it.

Mr. Davidson thought it would be better on the whole if he were to pass me off as his wife. Perhaps it would, but it seems a pity that so much good German should be wasted.

We got up from that dinner with even more haste than we had sat down. All lights in the town were put out at eight–thirty, and we didn't want to go crawling and blundering about in the dark with our ambulance car. There was a general feeling that the faster we ran back to Ghent the better.

We left Mr. Davidson and Dr. Wilson in Antwerp. They were staying over–night for the fun of the thing.

Another awful struggle on the downward slope from the quay to the bridge of boats. A bad jam at the turn. A sudden loosening and letting go of the traffic, and we were over.

We ran back to Ghent so fast that at Saint Nicolas (where we stopped to pick up our poor little Belgian professor) we took the wrong turn at the fork of the road and dashed with considerable *élan*over the Dutch frontier. We only realized it when a sentry in an unfamiliar uniform raised his rifle and prepared to fire, not with the cheerful, perfunctory vigilance of our Belgians, but in a determined, business–like manner, and the word "Achille," imparted in a burst of confidence, produced no sympathy whatever. On the contrary, this absurd sentry (who had come out of a straw sentry–box that was like an enormous beehive) went on pointing his rifle at us with most unnecessary persistence. I was so interested in seeing what he would do next that I missed the very pleasing behaviour of the little Belgian professor, who sat next to me, wrapped in his brown shawl. He still imagined himself to be on the road to Ghent, and when he saw that sentry continuing to prepare to fire in spite of our password, he concluded that we and the road to Ghent were in the hands of the Germans. So he instantly ducked behind me for cover and collapsed on the floor of the ambulance in his shawl.

Then somebody said "We're in Holland!" and there were shouts of laughter from everybody in the car except the little Belgian. Then shouts of laughter from the Dutch sentries and Customs officers, who enjoyed this excellent joke as much as we did.

We were now out of our course by I don't know how many miles and short of petrol. But one of the Customs officers gave us all we wanted.

It's heart–breaking the way these dear Belgians take the British. They have waited so long for our army, believing that it would come, till they could believe no more. In Ghent, in Antwerp, you wouldn't know that Belgium had any allies; you never see the British flag, or the French either, hanging from the windows. The black, yellow and red standard flies everywhere alone. Now that we *have* come, their belief in us is almost unbearable. They really think we are going to save Antwerp. Somewhere between Antwerp and Saint Nicolas the population of a whole village turned out to meet us with cries of "*Les Anglais! Les Anglaises!*" and laughed for joy. Terrible for us, who had heard Belgians say reproachfully: "We thought that the British would come to our help. But they never came!" They said it

more in sorrow than in anger; but you couldn’t persuade them that the British fought for Belgium at Mons.

We got into Ghent about midnight.

Dr. ― is to stay at the Hôtel de la Poste to–night.

Monday, 5th

The mosquitoes from the canal have come up and bitten me. I was ill all night with something that felt like malarial fever, if it isn't influenza. Couldn't get up—too drowsy.

Mr. L. came in to see me first thing in the morning. He also came to hear at first hand the story of our run into Antwerp. He was extremely kind. He sat and looked at me sorrowfully, as if he had been the family doctor, and gave me some of his very own China tea (in Belgium in war–time this is one of the most devoted things that man can do for his brother). He was so gentle and so sympathetic that my heart went out to him, and I forgot all about poor Mr. Davidson, and gave up to him the whole splendid "scoop" of the British troops at Saint Nicolas.

I couldn't tell him much about the run into Antwerp. No doubt it was a thrilling performance—through all the languor of malaria it thrills me now when I think of it—but it wasn't much to offer a War Correspondent, since it took us nowhere near the bombardment. It had nothing for the psychologist or for the amateur of strange sensations, and nothing for the pure and ardent Spirit of Adventure, and nothing for that insatiable and implacable Self, that drives you to the abhorred experiment, determined to know how you will come out of it. For there was no more danger in the excursion than in a run down to Brighton and back; and I know no more of fear or courage than I did before I started.

But now that I realize what the insatiable and implacable Self is after, how it worked in me against all decency and all pity, how it actually made me feel as if I wanted to see Antwerp under siege, and how the spirit of adventure backed it up, I can forgive the Commandant. I still think that he sinned when he took Ursula Dearmer to Termonde and to Alost. But the temptation that assailed him at Alost and Termonde was not to be measured by anybody who was not there.

It must have been irresistible.

Besides, it is not certain that he did take Ursula Dearmer into danger; it is every bit as likely that she took him; more likely still that they were both victims of *force majeure*, fascinated by the lure of the greatest possible danger. And, oh, how I did pitch into him!

I am ashamed of the things I said in that access of insulting and indignant virtue.

Can it be that I was jealous of Ursula Dearmer, that innocent girl, because she saw a shell burst and I didn't? I know this is what was the matter with Mrs. Torrence the other day. She even seemed to imply that there was some feminine perfidy in Ursula Dearmer's power of drawing shells to her. (She, poor dear, can't attract even a bullet within a mile of her.)[15]

Lying there, in that mosquito–haunted room, I dissolved into a blessed state, a beautiful, drowsy tenderness to everybody, a drowsy, beautiful forgiveness of the Commandant. I forgot that he intimated, sternly, that no ambulance would be at my disposal in the flight from Ghent—I remember only that he took me into Antwerp yesterday, and that he couldn't help it if the outer forts *were* thirty kilometres away, and I forgive him, beautifully and drowsily.

But when he came running up in great haste to see me, and rushed down into the kitchens of the Hotel to order soup for me, and into the chemist's shop in the Place d'Armes to get my medicine, and ran back again to give it me, before I knew where I was (such is the

[15] This was made up to her afterwards! Her cup fairly ran over.

debilitating influence of malaria), instead of forgiving him, I found myself, in abject contrition, actually asking him to forgive *me*.

It was all wrong, of course; but the mosquitoes had bitten me rather badly.

* * * * *

Mrs. Torrence and Janet McNeil have got to work at last. All afternoon and all night yesterday they were busy between the Station and the hospitals removing the wounded from the Antwerp trains.

And Car 1 had no sooner got into the yard of the "Flandria" to rest after its trip to Antwerp and back than it was ordered out again with the Commandant and Ursula Dearmer and Mrs. Torrence to meet the last ambulance train. The chauffeur Tom was nowhere to be seen when the order came. He was, however, found after much search, in the Park, in the company of the Cricklewood bus and a whole regiment of Tommies.

One of these ambulance trains had been shelled by the Germans (they couldn't have been very far from us in our run from Antwerp—it was their nearness, in fact, that accounted for our prodigious haste!), and many of the men came in worse wounded than they went out.

We are all tremendously excited over the arrival of the Tommies and the Cricklewood bus. We can think of nothing else but the relief of Antwerp.

Ursula Dearmer came to see me. She understands that I have forgiven her that shell—and why. She wore the clothes—the rather heart–rending school–girl clothes—she wore when she came to see the Committee. But oh, how the youngest but one has grown up since then!

Mrs. Torrence came to see me also, and Janet McNeil. Mrs. Torrence, though that shell still rankles, is greatly appeased by the labours of last night. So is Janet.

They told rather a nice story.

A train full of British troops from Ostend came into the station yesterday at the same time as the ambulance train from Antwerp. The two were drawn up one on each side of the same platform. When the wounded Belgians saw the British they struggled to their feet. At every window of the ambulance train bandaged heads were thrust out and bandaged hands waved. And the Belgians shouted.

But the British stood dumb, stolid and impassive before their enthusiasm.

Mrs. Torrence called out, "Give them a cheer, boys. They're the bravest little soldiers in the world."

Then the Tommies let themselves go, and the Station roof nearly flew off with the explosion.

The Corps worked till four in the morning clearing out those ambulance trains. The wards are nearly full. And this is only the beginning.

Tuesday, 6th

Malaria gone.

The Commandant called to give his report of the ambulance work. He, Mrs. Torrence, Janet McNeil, Ursula Dearmer and the men were working all yesterday afternoon and evening till long past dark at Termonde. It's the finest thing they've done yet. The men and the women crawled on their hands and knees in the trenches [? under the river bank] under fire. Ursula Dearmer (that girl's luck is simply staggering!)—Ursula Dearmer, wandering adventurously apart, after dark, on the battle–field, found a young Belgian officer, badly wounded, lying out under a tree. She couldn't carry him, but she went for two stretchers and three men; and they put the young officer on one stretcher, and she trotted off with his sword, his cap and the rest of his accoutrements on the other. He owes his life to this manifestation of her luck.

Dr. Wilson has come back from Antwerp.

It looks as if Dr. Haynes and Dr. Bird would go. At any rate, I think they will give up working on the Field Ambulance. There aren't enough cars for four surgeons *and* four field–women, and they have seen hardly any service. This is rather hard luck on them, as they gave up their practice to come out with us. Naturally, they don't want to waste any more time.

I managed to get some work done to–day. Wrote a paragraph about the Ambulance for Mr. L., who will publish it in the *Westminster* under his name, to raise funds for us. He is more than ever certain that it (the Ambulance) is the real thing.

Also wrote an article ("L'Hôpital Militaire, No. 2") for the *Daily Chronicle*; the first bit of journalism I've had time or material for.

Shopped. Very *triste* affair.

Went to mass in the Cathedral. Sat far back among the refugees.

If you want to know what Religion really is, go into a Catholic church in a Catholic country under invasion. You only feel the tenderness, the naïveté of Catholicism in peace–time. In war–time you realize its power.

Evening

Saw Mr. P., who has been at Termonde. He spoke with great praise of the gallantry of our Corps.

It's odd—either I'm getting used to it, or it's the effect of that run into Antwerp—but I'm no longer torn by fear and anxiety for their safety.

[?] Dined with Mr. L. in a restaurant in the town. It proved to be more expensive than either of us cared for. Our fried sole left us hungry and yet conscience–stricken, as if after an orgy, suffering in a dreadful communion of guilt.

Wednesday, 7th

7 A.M. Got up early and went to Mass in the Cathedral.

Prepared report for British Red Cross. Wrote “Journal of Impressions” from September 25th to September 26th, 11 A.M. It’s slow work. Haven’t got out of Ostend yet!

Fighting at Zele.

Afternoon

Got very near the fighting this time.

Mr. L. (Heaven bless him!) took me out with him in the War Correspondents’ car to see what the Ambulance was doing at Zele, and, incidentally, to look at the bombardment of some evacuated villages near it (I have no desire to see the bombardment of any village that has not been evacuated first). Mr. M. came too, and they brought a Belgian lady with them, a charming and beautiful lady, whose name I forget.

When Mr. L. told me to get up and come with him to Zele, I did get up with an energy and enthusiasm that amazed me; I got up like one who has been summoned at last, after long waiting, to a sure and certain enterprise. I can trust Mr. L. or any War Correspondent who means business, as I cannot (after Antwerp) trust the Commandant. So far, if the Commandant happens upon a bombardment it has been either in the way of duty, or by sheer luck, or both, as at Alost and Termonde, when duty took him to these places, and any bombardment or firing was, as it were, thrown in. He did not go out deliberately to seek it, for its own sake, and find it infallibly, which is the War Correspondent’s way. So that if Mr. L. says there is going to be a bombardment, we shall probably get somewhere nearer to it than thirty kilometres.

We took the main road to Zele. I don’t know whether it was really a continuation of the south–east road that runs under the Hospital windows; anyhow, we left it very soon, striking southwards to the right to find what Mr. L. believed to be a short cut. Thus we never got to Zele at all. We came out on a good straight road that would no doubt have led us there in time, but that we allowed ourselves to be lured by the smoke of the great factory at Schoonard burning away to the south.

For a long time I could not believe that it was smoke we saw and not an enormous cloud blown by the wind across miles of sky. We seemed to run for miles with that terrible banner streaming on our right to the south, apparently in the same place, as far off as ever. East of it, on the sky–line, was a whole fleet of little clouds that hung low over the earth; that rose from it; rose and were never lifted, but as they were shredded away, scattered and vanished, were perpetually renewed. This movement of their death and re–birth had a horrible sinister pulse in it.

Each cloud of this fleet of clouds was the smoke from a burning village.

At last, after an endless flanking pursuit of the great cloud that continued steadily on our right, piling itself on itself and mounting incessantly, we struck into a side lane that seemed to lead straight to the factory on fire. But in this direct advance the cloud eluded us at every turn of the lane. Now it was rising straight in front of us in the south, now it was streaming away somewhere to the west of our track. When we went west it went east. When we went east it went west. And wherever we went we met refugees from the burning villages. They were trudging along slowly, very tired, very miserable, but with no panic and no violent grief. We

passed through villages and hamlets, untouched still, but waiting quietly, and a little breathlessly, on the edge of their doom.

At the end of one lane, where it turned straight to the east round the square of a field we came upon a great lake ringed with trees and set in a green place of the most serene and vivid beauty. It seemed incredible that the same hour should bring us to this magic stillness and peace and within sight of the smoke of war and within sound of the guns.

At the next turn we heard them.

We still thought that we could get to Schoonard, to the burning factory, and work back to Zele by a slight round. But at this turn we had lost sight of Schoonard and the great cloud altogether, and found ourselves in a little hamlet Heaven knows where. Only, straight ahead of us, as we looked westwards, we heard the guns. The sound came from somewhere over there and from two quarters; German guns booming away on the south, Belgian [? French] guns answering from the north.

Judging by these sounds and those we heard afterwards, we must have been now on the outer edge of a line of fire stretching west and east and following the course of the Scheldt. The Germans were entrenched behind the river.

In the little hamlet we asked our way of a peasant. As far as we could make out from his mixed French and Flemish, he told us to turn back and take the road we had left where it goes south to the village of Baerlaere. This we did. We gathered that we could get a road through Baerlaere to Schoonard. Failing Schoonard, our way to Zele lay through Baerlaere in the opposite direction.

We set off along a very bad road to Baerlaere.

Coming into Baerlaere, we saw a house with a remarkable roof, a steep–pitched roof of black and white tiles arranged in a sort of chequer–board pattern. I asked Mr. L. if he had ever seen a roof like that in his life and he replied promptly, “Yes; in China.” And that roof—if it was coming into Baerlaere that we saw it—is all that I can remember of Baerlaere. There was, I suppose, the usual church with its steeple where the streets forked and the usual town hall near it, with a flight of steps before the door and a three–cornered classic pediment; and the usual double line of flat–fronted, grey–shuttered houses; I do seem to remember these things as if they had really been there, but you couldn’t see the bottom half of the houses for the troops that were crowded in front of them, or the top half for the shells you tried to see and didn’t. They were sweeping high up over the roofs, making for the entrenchments and the batteries beyond the village.

We had come bang into the middle of an artillery duel. It was going on at a range of about a mile and a half, but all over our heads, so that though we heard it with great intensity, we saw nothing.

There were intervals of a few seconds between the firing. The Belgian [? French] batteries were pounding away on the left quite near (the booming seemed to come from behind the houses at our backs), and the German on the right, farther away.

Now, you may have hated and dreaded the sound of guns all your life, as you hate and dread any immense and violent noise, but there is something about the sound of the first near gun of your first battle that, so far from being hateful or dreadful, or in any way abhorrent to you, will make you smile in spite of yourself with a kind of quiet exultation mixed very oddly with

reminiscence.[16] so that, though your first impression (by no means disagreeable) is of being "in for it," your next, after the second and the third gun, is that of having been in for it many times before. The effect on your nerves is now like that of being in a very small sailing–boat in a very big–running sea. You climb wave after high wave, and are not swallowed up as you expected. You wait, between guns, for the boom and the shock of the next, with a passionate anticipation, as you wait for the next wave. And the sound of the gun when it comes is like the exhilarating smack of the wave that you and your boat mean to resist and do resist when it gets you.

You do not think, as you used to think when you sat safe in your little box–like house in St. John's Wood, how terrible it is that shells should be hurtling through the air and killing men by whole regiments. You do not think at all. Nobody anywhere near you is thinking that sort of thing, or thinking very much at all.

At the sound of the first near gun I found myself looking across the road at a French soldier. We were smiling at each other.

When we tried to get to Schoonard from the west end of the town we were stopped and turned back by the General in command. Not in the least abashed by this *contretemps*, Mr. L., after some parley with various officers, decided not to go back in ignominious safety by the way we came, but to push on from the east end of the village into the open country through the line of fire that stretched between us and the road to Zele. On our way, while we were about it, he said, we might as well stop and have a look at the Belgian batteries at work—as if he had said we might as well stop at Olympia and have a look at the Motor Show on our way to Richmond.

At this point the unhappy chauffeur, who had not found himself by any means at home in Baerlaere, remarked that he had a wife and family dependent on him.

Mr. L. replied with dignity that he had a wife and family too, and that we all had somebody or something; and that War Correspondents cannot afford to think of their wives and families at these moments.

Mr. M.'s face backed up Mr. L. with an expression of extreme determination.

The little Belgian lady smiled placidly and imperturbably, with an air of being ready to go anywhere where these intrepid Englishmen should see fit to take her.

I felt a little sorry for the chauffeur. He had been out with the War Correspondents several times already, and I hadn't.

We left him and his car behind us in the village, squeezed very tight against a stable wall that stood between them and the German fire. We four went on a little way beyond the village and turned into a bridle path across the open fields. At the bottom of a field to our left was a small slump of willows; we had heard the Belgian guns firing from that direction a few minutes before. We concluded that the battery was concealed behind the willows. We strolled on like one half of a picnic party that has been divided and is looking innocently for the other half in a likely place.[17] But as we came nearer to the willows we lost our clue. The battery had evidently made up its mind not to fire as long as we were in sight. Like the cloud of smoke from the Schoonard factory, it eluded us successfully. And indeed it is hardly the way of

[16] More than likely our appearance there stopped the firing.
[17] Except that nobody had any time to attend to us, I can't think why we weren't all four of us arrested for spies. We hadn't any business to be looking for the position of the Belgian batteries.

batteries to choose positions where interested War Correspondents can come out and find them.[18]

So we went back to the village, where we found the infantry being drawn up in order and doing something to its rifles. For one thrilling moment I imagined that the Germans were about to leap out of their trenches and rush the village, and that the Belgians [? French] were preparing for a bayonet charge.

"In that case," I thought, "we shall be very useful in picking up the wounded and carrying them away in that car."

I never thought of the ugly rush and the horrors after it. It is extraordinary how your mind can put away from it any thought that would make life insupportable.

But no, they were not fixing bayonets. They were not doing anything to their rifles; they were only stacking them.

It was then that you thought of the ugly rush and were glad that, after all, it wouldn't happen.

You were glad—and yet in spite of that same gladness, there was a little sense of disappointment, unaccountable, unpardonable, and not quite sane.

One of the men showed us a burst shrapnel shell. We examined it with great interest as the kind of thing that would be most likely to hit us on our way from Baerlaere to Zele.

We had been barely half an hour hanging about Baerlaere, but it seemed as if we had wasted a whole afternoon there. At last we started. We were told to drive fast, as the fire might open on us at any minute. We drove very fast. Our road lay through open country flat to the river, with no sort of cover anywhere from the German fire, if it chose to come. About half a mile ahead of us was a small hamlet that had been shelled. Mr. L. told us to duck when we heard the guns. I remember thinking that I particularly didn't want to be wounded in my right arm, and that as I sat with my right arm resting on the ledge of the car it was somewhat exposed to the German batteries, so I wriggled low down in my seat and tucked my arm well under cover for quite five minutes. But you couldn't see anything that way, so I popped up again and presently forgot all about my valuable arm in the sheer excitement of the rush through the danger zone. Our car was low on the ground; still, it was high enough and big enough to serve as a mark for the German guns and it fairly gave them the range of the road.

But though the guns had been pounding away before we started, they ceased firing as we went through.

That, however, was sheer luck. And presently it was brought home to me that we were not the only persons involved in the risk of this joyous adventure. Just outside the bombarded hamlet ahead of us we were stopped by some Belgian [? French] soldiers hidden in the cover of a ditch by the roadside, which if it was not a trench might very easily have been one. They were talking in whispers for fear of being overheard by the Germans, who must have been at least a mile off, across the fields on the other side of the river. A mile seemed a pretty safe distance; but Mr. L. said it wouldn't help us much, considering that the range of their guns was twenty–four miles. The soldiers told us we couldn't possibly get through to Zele. That was true. The road was blocked—by the ruins of the hamlet—not twenty yards from where we were pulled up. We got out of the car; and while Mr. L. and the Belgian lady conversed with the soldiers, Mr. M. and I walked on to investigate the road.

[18] More than likely our appearance there stopped the firing.

At the abrupt end of a short row of houses it stopped where it should have turned suddenly, and became a rubbish–heap lying in a waste place.

Just at first I thought we must have gone out of our course somehow and missed the road to Zele. It was difficult to realize that this rubbish–heap lying in a waste place ever *had* been a road. But for the shell of a house that stood next to it, the last of the row, and the piles of lath and plaster, and the shattered glass on the sidewalk and the blown dust everywhere, it might have passed for the ordinary no–thoroughfare of an abandoned brick–field.

Mr. M. made me keep close under the wall of a barn or something on the other side of the street, the only thing that stood between us and the German batteries. Beyond the barn were the green fields bare to the guns that had shelled this end of the village. At first we hugged our shelter tight, only looking out now and then round the corner of the barn into the open country.

A flat field, a low line of willows at the bottom, and somewhere behind the willows the German batteries. Grey puffs were still curling about the stems and clinging to the tops of the willows. They might have been mist from the river or smoke from the guns we had heard. I hadn't time to watch them, for suddenly Mr. M. darted from his cover and made an alarming sally into the open field.

He said he wanted to find some pieces of nice hot shell for me.

So I had to run out after Mr. M. and tell him I didn't want any pieces of hot shell, and pull him back into safety.

All for nothing. Not a gun fired.

We strolled across what was left of the narrow street and looked through the window–frames of a shattered house. It had been a little inn. The roof and walls of the parlour had been wrecked, so had most of the furniture. But on a table against the inner wall a row of clean glasses still stood in their order as the landlord had left them; and not one of them was broken.

I suppose it must have been about time for the guns to begin firing again, for Mr. L. called to us to come back and to look sharp too. So we ran for it. And as we leaped into the car Mr. L. reproved Mr. M. gravely and virtuously for "taking a lady into danger."

The car rushed back into Baerlaere if anything faster than it had rushed out, Mr. L. sitting bolt upright with an air of great majesty and integrity. I remember thinking that it would never, never do to duck if the shells came, for if we did Mr. L.'s head would stand out like a noble monument and he would be hit as infallibly as any cathedral in Belgium.

It seems that the soldiers were not particularly pleased at our blundering up against their trench in our noisy car, which, they said, might draw down the German fire at any minute on the Belgian lines.

We got into Ghent after dark by the way we came.

Evening

Called at the "Flandria." Ursula Dearmer and two Belgian nurses have been sent to the convent at Zele to work there to–night.

Mr. — is here. But you wouldn't know him. I have just been introduced to him without knowing him. Before the War he was a Quaker,[19] a teetotaller, and a pacifist at any price. And I suppose he wore clothes that conformed more or less to his principles. Now he is wearing the uniform of a British naval officer. He is drinking long whiskies–and–sodas in the restaurant, in the society of Major R. And the Major's khaki doesn't give a point to the Quaker's uniform. As for the Quaker, they say he could give points to any able seaman when it comes to swear words (but this may be sheer affectionate exaggeration). His face and his high, hatchet nose, whatever colour they used to be, are now the colour of copper—not an ordinary, Dutch kettle and coal–scuttle, pacifist, arts–and–crafts copper, but a fine old, truculent, damn–disarmament, Krupp–&–Co., bloody, ammunition copper, and battered by the wars of all the world. He is the commander and the owner of an armoured car, one of the unit of five volunteer armoured cars. I do not know whether he was happy or unhappy when there wasn't a war. No man, and certainly no Quaker, could possibly be happier than this Quaker is now. He and the Major have been out potting Germans all the afternoon. (They have accounted for nine.) A schoolboy who has hit the mark nine times running with his first toy rifle is not merrier than, if as merry as, these more than mature men with their armoured car. They do not say much, but you gather that it is more fun being a volunteer than a regular; it is to enjoy delight with liberty, the maximum of risk with the minimum of responsibility.

And their armoured car—if it is the one I saw standing to–day in the Place d'Armes—it is, as far as you can make out through its disguises, an ordinary open touring car, with a wooden hoarding (mere matchboard) stuck all round it, the whole painted grey to simulate, armoured painting. Through four holes, fore and aft and on either side of her, their machine–guns rake the horizon. The Major and Mr. — sit inside, hidden behind the matchboard plating. They scour the country. When they see any Germans they fire and bring them down. It is quite simple. When you inquire how they can regard that old wooden rabbit–hutch as an armoured cover, they reply that their car isn't for defence, it's for attack. The Germans have only to see their guns and they're off. And really it looks like it, since the two are actually here before your eyes, drinking whiskies–and–sodas, and the rest of the armoured car corps are alive somewhere in Ghent.

Dear Major R. and Mr. — (whom I never met before), unless they read this Journal, which isn't likely, they will never know how my heart warmed towards them, nor how happy I count myself in being allowed to see them. They showed me how good it is to be alive; how excellent, above all things, to be a man and to be young for ever, and to go out into the most gigantic war in history, sitting in an armoured car which is as a rabbit–hutch for safety, and to have been a pacifist, that is to say a sinner, like Mr. —, so that on the top of it you feel the whole glamour and glory of conversion. Others may have known the agony and the fear and sordid filth and horror and the waste, but they know nothing but the clean and fiery passion and the contagious ecstasy of war.

If you were to tell Mr. — about the mystic fascination of the south–east road, the road that leads eventually to Waterloo, he would most certainly understand you, but it is very doubtful whether he would let you venture very far down it. Whereas the Commandant, sooner or later, will.

[19] I have since been told that he was not. And I think in any case I am wrong about his "matchboard" car. It must have been somebody else's. In fact, I'm very much afraid that "he" was somebody else—that I hadn't the luck really to meet him.

Thursday, 8th

Had breakfast with Mr. L.

Went down to the "Flandria." They say Zele has been taken. There has been terrific anxiety here for Ursula Dearmer and the two Belgian nurses (Madame F.'s daughter and niece), who were left there all night in the convent, which may very well be in the hands of the Germans by now. An Ambulance car went off very early this morning to their rescue and has brought them back safe.

We are told that the Germans are really advancing on Ghent. We have orders to prepare to leave it at a minute's notice. This time it looks as if there might be something in it.

I attend to the Commandant's correspondence. Wired Mr. Hastings. Wired Miss F. definitely accepting the Field Ambulance Corps and nurses she has raised in Glasgow. Her idea is that her Ambulance should be an independent unit attached to our corps but bearing her name. (Seems rather a pity to bring the poor lady out just now when things are beginning to be risky and our habitations uncertain.)

The British troops are pouring into Ghent. There is a whole crowd of them in the *Place* in front of the Station. And some British wounded from Antwerp are in our Hospital.

Heavy fighting at Lokeren, between Ghent and Saint Nicolas. Car 1 has been sent there with the Commandant, Ursula Dearmer, Janet McNeil and the Chaplain (Mr. Foster has been hurt in lifting a stretcher; he is out of it, poor man). Mrs. Torrence, Dr. Wilson and Mr. Riley have been sent to Nazareth. Mrs. Lambert has gone to Lokeren with her husband in his car.

I was sent for this morning by somebody who desired to see the English Field Ambulance. Drawn up before the Hospital I found all that was left of a Hendon bus, in the charge of two British Red Cross volunteers in khaki and a British tar. The three were smiling in full enjoyment of the high comedy of disaster. They said they were looking for a job, and they wanted to know if our Ambulance would take them on. They were keen. They had every qualification under the sun.

"Only," they said, "there's one thing we bar. And that's the firing–line. We've been under shell–fire for fifteen hours—and look at our bus!"

The bus was a thing of heroism and gorgeous ruin. The nose of its engine looked as if it had nuzzled its way through a thousand *débâcles*; its dark–blue sides were coated with dust and mud to the colour of an armoured car. The letters M. E. T. were barely discernible through the grey. Its windows were shattered to mere jags and spikes and splinters of glass that adhered marvellously to their frames.

I don't know how I managed to convey to the three volunteers that such a bus would be about as much use to our Field Ambulance as an old greenhouse that had come through an earthquake. It was one of the saddest things I ever had to do.

Unperturbed, and still credulous of adventure, they climbed on to their bus, turned her nose round, and went, smiling, away.

Who they were, and what corps they belonged to, and how they acquired that Metropolitan bus I shall never know, and do not want to know. I would far rather think of them as the heroes of some fantastic enterprise, careering in gladness and in mystery from one besieged city to another.

Saw Madame F., who looks worried. She suggested that I should come back to the Hospital. She says it must be inconvenient for the Commandant not to have his secretary always at hand. At the same time, we are told that the Hospital is filling up so fast that our rooms will be wanted. And anyhow, Dr. — has got mine.

I have found an absurd little hotel, the Hôtel Cecil in the *Place*, opposite the Hospital, where I can have a room. Then I can be on duty all day.

Went down to the "Poste." Gave up my room, packed and took leave of the nice fat *propriétaire* and his wife.

Driving through the town, I meet French troops pouring through the streets. There was very little cheering.

Settled into the Hôtel Cecil; if it could be called settling when my things have to stay packed, in case the Germans come before the evening.

The Hôtel Cecil is a thin slice of a house with three rooms on each little floor, and a staircase like a ladder. There is something very sinister about this smallness and narrowness and steepness. You say to yourself: Supposing the Germans really do come into Ghent; there will be some Uhlans among them; and the Uhlans will certainly come into the Hôtel Cecil, and they will get very drunk in the restaurant below; and you might as well be in a trap as in this den at the top of the slice up all these abominable little steep stairs. And you are very glad that your room has a balcony.

But though your room has a balcony it hasn't got a table, or any space where a table could stand. There is hardly anything in it but a big double bed and a tall hat–stand. I have never seen a room more inappropriate to a secretary and reporter.

The proprietor and his wife are very amiable. He is a Red Cross man; and they have taken two refugee women into their house. They have promised faithfully that by noon there shall be a table.

Noon has come; and there is no table.

The cars have come back from Lokeren and Nazareth, full of wounded.

Mrs. Lambert and her husband have come back from Lokeren. They drove right into the German lines to fetch two wounded. They were promptly arrested and as promptly released when their passports had shown them to be good American citizens. They brought back their two wounded. Altogether, ten or fifteen wounded have been brought back from Lokeren this morning.

Afternoon

The Commandant has taken me out with the Ambulance for the first time. We were to go to Lokeren.

On the way we came up with the Lamberts in their scouting–car. They asked me to get out of the Ambulance car and come with them. On the whole, after this morning, it looked as if the scouting–car promised better incident. So I threw in my lot with the Lamberts.

It was a little disappointing, for no sooner had the Ambulance car got clean away than the scouting–car broke down. Also Mr. Lambert stated that it was not his intention to take Mrs. Lambert into the German lines again to–day if he could possibly help it.

We waited for an exasperating twenty minutes while the car got righted. From our street, in a blue transparent sky, so high up that it seemed part of the transparency, we saw a Taube

hanging over Ghent. People came out of their houses and watched it with interest and a kind of amiable toleration.

At last we got off; and the scouting–car made such good running that we came up with our Ambulance in a small town half–way between Ghent and Lokeren. We stopped here to confer with the Belgian Army Medical officers. They told us it was impossible to go on to Lokeren. Lokeren was now in the hands of the Germans. The wounded had been brought into a small village about two miles away.

When we got into the village we were told to go back at once, for the Germans were coming in. The Commandant answered that we had come to fetch the wounded and were certainly not going back without them. It seemed that there were only four wounded, and they had been taken into houses in the village.

We were given five minutes to get them out and go.

I suppose we stayed in that village quite three–quarters of an hour.

It was one straight street of small houses, and beyond the last house about a quarter of a mile of flat road, a quiet, grey road between tall, slender trees, then the turn. And behind the turn the Germans were expected to come in from Lokeren every minute.

And we had to find the houses and the wounded men.

The Commandant went into the first house and came out again very quickly.

The man in the room inside was dead.

We went on up the village.

Down that quiet road and through the village, swerving into the rough, sandy track that fringed the paved street, a battery of Belgian artillery came clattering in full retreat. The leader turned his horse violently into a side alley and plunged down it. I was close behind the battery when it turned; I could see the faces of the men. They had not that terrible look that Mr. Davidson told me he saw on the faces of Belgians in retreat from [?] Zele. There was no terror in them, only a sort of sullen annoyance and disgust.

I was walking beside the Commandant, and how I managed to get mixed up with this battery I don't know. First of all it held me up when it turned, then when I got through, it still came on and cut me off from the Commandant. (The rest of the Corps were with the Ambulance in the middle of the village.)

Then, through the plunging train, I caught sight of the innocent Commandant, all by himself, strolling serenely towards the open road, where beyond the bend the Germans were presumably pursuing the battery. It was terribly alarming to see the Commandant advancing to meet them, all alone, without a word of German to protect him.

There were gaps in the retreat, and I dashed through one of them (as you dash through the traffic in the Strand when you're in a hurry) and went after the Commandant with the brilliant idea of defending him with a volley of bad German hurled at the enemy's head.

And the Commandant went on, indifferent both to his danger and to his salvation, and disappeared down a little lane and into a house where a wounded man was. I stood at the end of the lane with the sublime intention of guarding it.

The Commandant came out presently. He looked as if he were steeped in a large, vague leisure, and he asked me to go and find Mr. Lambert and his scouting–car. Mr. Lambert had got to go to Lokeren to fetch some wounded.

So I ran back down the village and found Mr. Lambert and his car at the other end of it. He accepted his destiny with a beautiful transatlantic calm and dashed off to Lokeren. I do not think he took his wife with him this time.[20]

I went back to see if the Germans had got any nearer to the Commandant. They hadn't. What with dressings and bandages and looking for wounded, the Ambulance must have worked for about half an hour, and not any Germans had turned the corner yet.

It was still busy getting its load safely stowed away. Nothing for the wretched Secretary to do but to stand there at the far end of the village, looking up the road to Lokeren. There was a most singular fascination about the turn of that road beyond the trees.

Suddenly, at what seemed the last minute of safety, two Belgian stretcher–bearers, without a stretcher, rushed up to me. They said there was a man badly wounded in some house somewhere up the road. I found a stretcher and went off with them to look for him.

We went on and on up the road. It couldn't have been more than a few hundred yards, really, if as much; but it felt like going on and on; it seemed impossible to find that house.

* * * * *

There was something odd about that short stretch of grey road and the tall trees at the end of it and the turn. These things appeared in a queer, vivid stillness, as if they were not there on their own account, but stood in witness to some superior reality. Through them you were somehow assured of Reality with a most singular and overpowering certainty. You were aware of the possibility of an ensuing agony and horror as of something unreal and transitory that would break through the peace of it in a merely episodical manner. Whatever happened to come round the turn of the road would simply not matter.

And with your own quick movements up the road there came that steadily mounting thrill which is not excitement, or anything in the least like excitement, because of its extreme quietness. This thrill is apt to cheat you by stopping short of the ecstasy it seems to promise. But this time it didn't stop short; it became more and more steady and more and more quiet in the swing of its vibration; it became ecstasy; it became intense happiness.

It lasted till we reached the little plantation by the roadside.

While it lasted you had the sense of touching Reality at its highest point in a secure and effortless consummation; so far were you from being strung up to any pitch.

Then came the plantation.

Behind the plantation, on a railway siding, a train came up from Lokeren with yet another load of wounded. And in the train there was confusion and agitation and fear. Belgian Red Cross men hung out by the doors of the train and clamoured excitedly for stretchers. There was only one stretcher, the one we had brought from the village.

Somebody complained bitterly: "*C'est mal arrangé. Avec les Allemands sur nos dos!*"

Somebody tried to grab our one stretcher. The two bearers seemed inclined to give it up. Nobody knew where our badly wounded man was. Nobody seemed very eager now to go and look for him. We three were surrounded and ordered to give up our stretcher. No use wasting time in hunting for one man, with the Germans on our backs.

None of the men we were helping out of the train were seriously hurt. I had to choose between my one badly wounded man, whom we hadn't found, and about a dozen who could

[20] He did. She was not a lady whom it was possible to leave behind on such an expedition.

stumble somehow into safety. But my two stretcher–bearers were wavering badly, and it was all I could do to keep them firmly to their job.

Then three women came out of a little house half hidden by the plantation. They spoke low, for fear the Germans should overhear them.

“He is here,” they said; “he is here.”

The stretcher–bearers hurried off with their stretcher. The train unloaded itself somehow.

The man, horribly hurt, with a wound like a red pit below his shoulder–blades, was brought out and laid on the stretcher. He lay there, quietly, on his side, in a posture of utter resignation to anguish.

He was a Flamand, clumsily built; he had a broad, rather ugly face, narrowing suddenly as the fringe of his whiskers became a little straggling beard. But to me he was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. And I loved him. I do not think it is possible to love, to adore any creature more than I loved and adored that clumsy, ugly Flamand.

He was my first wounded man.

For I tried, I still try, to persuade myself that if I hadn’t bullied my two bearers and repulsed the attack on my stretcher, he would have been left behind in the little house in the plantation.

We got him out of the plantation all right and on to the paved road. Ursula Dearmer at Termonde with her Belgian officer, and at Zele with all her wounded, couldn’t have been happier than I was with my one Flamand.

We got him a few yards down the road all right.

Then, to my horror, the bearers dumped him down on the paving–stones. They said he was much too heavy. They couldn’t possibly carry him any more unless they rested.

I didn’t think it was exactly the moment for resting, and I told them so. The Germans hadn’t come round the turn, and probably never would come; still, you never know; and the general impression seemed to be that they were about due.

But the bearers stood stolidly in the middle of the road and mopped their faces and puffed. The situation began to feel as absurd and as terrible as a nightmare.

So I grabbed one end of the stretcher and said I’d carry it myself. I said I wasn’t very strong, and perhaps I couldn’t carry it, but anyhow I’d try.

They picked it up at once then, and went off at a good swinging trot over the paving–stones that jolted my poor Flamand most horribly. I told them to go on the smooth track at the side. They hailed this suggestion as a most brilliant and original idea.

As the Flamand was brought into the village, the Ambulance had got its wounded in, and was ready to go. But he had to have his wound dressed.

He lay there on his stretcher in the middle of the village street, my beloved Flamand, stripped to the waist, with the great red pit of his wound yawning in his white flesh. I had to look on while the Commandant stuffed it with antiseptic gauze.

I had always supposed that the dressing of a wound was a cautious and delicate process. But it isn’t. There is a certain casual audacity about it. The Commandant’s hands worked rapidly as he rammed cyanide gauze into the red pit. It looked as if he were stuffing an old crate with straw. And it was all over in a moment. There seemed something indecent in the haste with which my Flamand was disposed of.

When the Commandant observed that my Flamand's wound looked much worse than it was, I felt hurt, as if this beloved person had been slighted; also as if there was some subtle disparagement to my "find."

I rather hoped that we were going to wait till the men I had left behind in the plantation had come up. But the car was fairly full, and Ursula Dearmer and Janet and Mrs. Lambert were told off to take it in to Z—, leave the wounded there and come back for the rest. I was to walk to Z— and wait there for the returning car.

Nothing would have pleased me better, but the distance was farther than the Commandant realized, farther, perhaps, than was desirable in the circumstances, so I was ordered to get on the car and come back with it.

(Tom the chauffeur is perfectly right. There are too many of us.)

We got away long before the Germans turned the corner, if they ever did turn it. In Z—, which is half–way between Lokeren and Ghent, we came upon six or seven fine military ambulances, all huddled together as if they sought safety in companionship (why none of them had been sent up to our village I can't imagine). Ursula Dearmer, with admirable presence of mind, commandeered one of these and went back with it to the village, so that we could take our load of wounded into Ghent. We did this, and went back at once.

The return journey was a tame affair. Before we got to Z— we met the Commandant and the Chaplain and two refugees, in Mr. Lambert's scouting–car, towed by a motor–wagon. It had broken down on the way from Lokeren. We took them on board and turned back to Ghent.

The wounded came on in Ursula Dearmer's military car.

Twenty–three wounded in all were taken from Lokeren or near it to–day. Hundreds had to be left behind in the German lines.

* * * * *

We have heard that Antwerp is burning; that the Government is removed to Ostend; that all the English have left.

There are a great many British wounded, with nurses and Army doctors, in Ghent. Three or four British have been brought into the "Flandria."

One of them is a young British officer, Mr. —. He is said to be mortally wounded.

Dr. Haynes and Dr. Bird have not gone. They and Dr. — have joined the surgical staff of the Hospital, and are working in the operating theatre all day. They have got enough to do now in all conscience.

All night there has been a sound of the firing of machine guns [?]. At first it was like the barking, of all the dogs in Belgium. I thought it *was* the dogs of Belgium, till I discovered a deadly rhythm and precision in the barking.[21]

[21] I'm inclined to think it may have been the dogs of Belgium, after all. I can't think where the guns could have been. Antwerp had fallen. It might have been the bombardment of Melle, though.

Friday, 9th

The Hospital is so full that beds have been put in the entrance hall, along the walls by the big ward and the secretarial bureau. In the recess by the ward there are three British soldiers.

There are some men standing about there whose heads and faces are covered with a thick white mask of cotton–wool like a diver's helmet. There are three small holes in each white mask, for mouth and eyes. The effect is appalling.

These are the men whose faces have been burned by shell–fire at Antwerp.

The Commandant asked me to come with him through the wards and find all the British wounded who are well enough to be sent home. I am to take their names and dress them and get them ready to go by the morning train.

There are none in the upper wards. Mr. — cannot be moved. He is very ill. They do not think he will live.

There are three downstairs in the hall. One is well enough to look after himself (I have forgotten his name). One, Russell, is wounded in the knee. The third, Cameron, a big Highlander, is wounded in the head. He wears a high headdress of bandages wound round and round many times like an Indian turban, and secured by more bandages round his jaw and chin. It is glued tight to one side of his head with clotted blood. Between the bandages his sharp, Highland face looks piteous.

I am to dress these two and have them ready by eleven. Dr. — of the British Field Hospital, who is to take them over, comes round to enter their names on his list.

They are to be dressed in civilian clothes supplied by the Hospital.

It all sounded very simple until you tried to get the clothes. First you had to see the President, who referred you to the Matron, who referred you to the clerk in charge of the clothing department. An*infirmier* (one of the mysterious officials who hang about the hall wearing peaked caps; the problem of their existence was now solved for the first time)— an *infirmier* was despatched to find the clerk. The clothing department must have been hidden in the remotest recesses of the Hospital, for it was ages before he came back to ask me all over again what clothes would be wanted. He was a little fat man with bright, curly hair, very eager, and very cheerful and very kind. He scuttled off again like a rabbit, and I had to call him back to measure Russell. And when he had measured Russell, with his gay and amiable alacrity, Russell and I had to wait until he came back with the clothes.

I had made up my mind very soon that it would be no use measuring Cameron for any clothes, or getting him ready for any train. He was moving his head from side to side and making queer moaning sounds of agitation and dismay. He had asked for a cigarette, which somebody had brought him. It dropped from his fingers. Somebody picked it up and lit it and stuck it in his mouth; it dropped again. Then I noticed something odd about his left arm; he was holding it up with his right hand and feeling it. It dropped, too, like a dead weight, on the counterpane. Cameron watched its behaviour with anguish. He complained that his left arm was all numb and too heavy to hold up. Also he said he was afraid to be moved and taken away.

It struck me that Cameron's head must be smashed in on the right side and that some pressure on his brain was causing paralysis. It was quite clear that he couldn't be moved. So I sent for one of the Belgian doctors to come and look at him, and keep him in the Hospital.

The Belgian doctor found that Cameron's head *was* smashed in on the right side, and that there was pressure on his brain, causing paralysis in his left arm.

He is to be kept in the Hospital and operated on this morning. They may save him if they can remove the pressure.

It seemed ages before the merry little *infirmier* came back with Russell's clothes. And when he did come he brought socks that were too tight, and went back and brought socks that were too large, and a shirt that was too tight and trousers that were too long. Then he went back, eager as ever, and brought drawers that were too tight, and more trousers that were too short. He brought boots that were too large and boots that were too tight; and he had to be sent back again for slippers. Last of all he brought a shirt which made Russell smile and mutter something about being dressed in all the colours of the rainbow; and a black cutaway morning coat, and a variety of hats, all too small for Russell.

Then when you had made a selection, you began to try to get Russell into all these things that were too tight or too loose for him. The socks were the worst. The right–hand one had to be put on very carefully, by quarter inches at a time; the least tug on the sock would give Russell an excruciating pain in his wounded knee; and Russell was all for violence and haste; he was so afraid of being left behind.

Though he called me "Sister," I felt certain that Russell must know that I wasn't a trained nurse and that he was the first wounded man I had ever dressed in my life. However, I did get him dressed, somehow, with the help of the little *infirmier*, and a wonderful sight he was, in the costume of a Belgian civilian.

What tried him most were the hats. He refused a peaked cap which the *infirmier* pressed on him, and compromised finally on a sort of checked cricket cap that just covered the extreme top of his head. We got him off in time, after all.

Then two *infirmiers* came with a stretcher and carried Cameron upstairs to the operating theatre, and I went up and waited with him in the corridor till the surgeons were ready for him. He had grown drowsy and indifferent by now.

I have missed the Ambulance going out to Lokeren, and have had to stay behind.

Two ladies called to see Mr. ―. One of them was Miss Ashley–Smith, who had him in her ward at Antwerp. I took them over the Hospital to find his room, which is on the second story. His name—his names—in thick Gothic letters, were on a white card by the door.

He was asleep and the nurse could not let them see him.

Miss Ashley–Smith and her friend are staying in the Couvent de Saint Pierre, where the British Field Hospital has taken some of its wounded.

Towards one o'clock news came of heavy fighting. The battle is creeping nearer to us; it has stretched from Zele and Quatrecht to Melle, four and a half miles from Ghent. They are saying that the Germans may enter Ghent to–day, in an hour—half an hour! It will be very awkward for us and for our wounded if they do, as both our ambulance cars are out.

Later news of more fighting at Quatrecht.

Afternoon

The Commandant has come back. They were at Quatrecht, not Lokeren.

Mr. ― is awake now. The Commandant has taken me to see him.

He is lying in one of the officers' wards, a small room, with bare walls and a blond light, looking south. There are two beds in this room, set side by side. In the one next the door there is a young French officer. He is very young: a boy with sleek black hair and smooth rose–leaf skin, shining and fresh as if he had never been near the smoke and dirt of battle. He is sitting up reading a French magazine. He is wounded in the leg. His crutches are propped up against the wall.

Stretched on his back in the further bed there is a very tall young Englishman. The sheet is drawn very tight over his chest; his face is flushed and he is breathing rapidly, in short jerks. At first you do not see that he, too, is not more than a boy, for he is so big and tall, and a little brown feathery beard has begun to curl about his jaw and chin.

When I came to him and the Commandant told him my name, he opened his eyes wide with a look of startled recognition. He said he knew me; he had seen me somewhere in England. He was so certain about it that he persuaded me that I had seen him somewhere. But we can neither of us remember where or when. They say he is not perfectly conscious all the time.

We stayed with him for a few minutes till he went off to sleep again.

None of the doctors think that he can live. He was wounded in front with mitrailleuse; eight bullets in his body. He has been operated on. How he survived the operation and the journey on the top of it I can't imagine. And now general peritonitis has set in. It doesn't look as if he had a chance.

* * * * *

We have heard that all the War Correspondents have been sent out of Ghent.

Numbers of British troops came in to–day.

Went up to see Mr. Foster, who is in his room, ill. It is hard lines that he should have had this accident when he has been working so splendidly. And it wasn't his fault, either. One of the Belgian bearers slipped with his end of a stretcher when they were carrying a heavy man, and Mr. Foster got hurt in trying to right the balance and save his wounded man. He is very much distressed at having to lie up and be waited on.

* * * * *

Impossible to write a Journal or any articles while I am in the Hospital, and there is no table yet in my room at the Hôtel Cecil.

The first ambulance car, with the chauffeur Bert and Mr. Riley, has come back from Melle, where they left Mrs. Torrence and Janet and Dr. Wilson. They went back again in the afternoon.

They are all out now except poor Mr. Foster and Mrs. Lambert, who is somewhere with her husband.

I am the only available member of the Corps left in the Hospital!

3.30

No Germans have appeared yet.

* * * * *

I was sitting up in the mess–room, making entries in the Day–Book, when I was sent for. Somebody or something had arrived, and was waiting below.

On the steps of the Hospital I found two brand–new British chauffeurs in brand–new suits of khaki. Behind them, drawn up in the entry, were two brand–new Daimler motor–ambulance cars.

I thought it was a Field Ambulance that had lost itself on the way to France. The chauffeurs (they had beautiful manners, and were very spick and span, and one pleased me by his remarkable resemblance to the editor of the *English Review*)—the chauffeurs wanted to know whether they had come to the right place. And of course they hardly had, if all the British Red Cross ambulance cars were going into France.

Then they explained.

They were certainly making for Ghent. The British Red Cross Society had sent them there. They were only anxious to know whether they had come to the right Hospital, the Hospital where the English Field Ambulance was quartered.

Yes: that was right. They had been sent for us.

They had just come up from Ostend, and they had not been ten minutes in Ghent before orders came through for an ambulance to be sent at once to Melle.

The only available member of the Corps was its Secretary and Reporter. To that utterly untrained and supremely inappropriate person Heaven sent this incredible luck.

When I think how easily I might have missed it! If I'd gone for a stroll in the town. If I'd sat five minutes longer with Mr. Foster. If the landlord of the Hôtel Cecil had kept his word and given me a table, when I should, to a dead certainty, have been writing this wretched Journal at the ineffable moment when the chauffeurs arrived.

I am glad to think that I had just enough morality left to play fair with Mrs. Lambert. I did try to find her, so that she shouldn't miss it. Somebody said she was in one of the restaurants on the *Place* with her husband. I looked in all the restaurants and she wasn't in one of them. The finger of Heaven pointed unmistakably to the Secretary and Reporter.

There was a delay of ten minutes, no more, while I got some cake and sandwiches for the hungry chauffeurs and took them to the bureau to have their brassards stamped. And in every minute of the ten I suffered tortures while we waited. I thought something *must* happen to prevent my taking that ambulance car out. I thought my heart would leave off beating and I should die before we started (I believe people feel like this sometimes before their wedding night). I thought the Commandant would come back and send out Ursula Dearmer instead. I thought the Military Power would come down from its secret hiding–place and stop me. But none of these things happened. At the last moment, I thought that M. C—

M. C— was the Belgian Red Cross guide who took us into Antwerp. To M. C— I said simply and firmly that I was going. The functions of the Secretary and Reporter had never been very clearly defined, and this was certainly not the moment to define them. M. C—, in his innocence, accepted me with confidence and a chivalrous gravity that left nothing to be desired.

The chauffeur Newlands (the leaner and darker one) declared himself ready for anything. All he wanted was to get to work. Poor Ascot, who was so like my friend the editor, had to be content with his vigil in the back yard.

At last we got off. I might have trusted Heaven. The getting off was a foregone conclusion, for we went along the south–east road, which had not worked its mysterious fascination for nothing.

At a fork where two roads go into Ghent we saw one of our old ambulance cars dashing into Ghent down the other road on our left. It was beyond hail. Heaven *meant* us to go on uninterrupted and unchallenged.

I had not allowed for trouble at the barrier. There always is a barrier, which may be anything from a mile to four miles from the field or village where the wounded are. Yesterday on the way to Lokeren the barrier was at Z—. To–day it was somewhere half–way between Ghent and Melle.

None of us had ever quite got to the bottom of the trouble at the barrier. We know that the Belgian authorities wisely refused all responsibility. Properly speaking, our ambulances were not supposed to go nearer than a certain safe distance from the enemy's firing–line. For two reasons. First, it stood the chance of being shelled or taken prisoner. Second, there was a very natural fear that it might draw down the enemy's fire on the Belgians. Our huge, lumbering cars, with their brand–new khaki hoods and flaming red crosses on a white ground, were an admirable mark for German guns. But as the Corps in this case went into the firing–line on foot, I do not think that the risk was to the Belgians. So, though in theory we stopped outside the barriers, in practice we invariably got through.

The new car was stopped at the barrier now by the usual Belgian Army Medical Officer. We were not to go on to Melle.

I said that we had orders to go on to Melle; and I meant to go on to Melle. The Medical Officer said again that we were not to go, and I said again that we were going.

Then that Belgian Army Medical Officer began to tell us what I imagine is the usual barrier tale.

There were any amount of ambulances at Melle.

There were no wounded at Melle.

And in any case this ambulance wouldn't be allowed to go there. And then the usual battle of the barrier had place.

It was one against three. For M. C— went over to the enemy, and the chauffeur Newlands, confronted by two official adversaries in uniform, became deafer and deafer to my voice in his right ear.

First, the noble and chivalrous Belgian Red Cross guide, with an appalling treachery, gave the order to turn the car round to Ghent. I gave the counter order. Newlands wavered for one heroic moment; then he turned the car round.

I jumped out and went up to the Army Medical Officer and delivered a frontal attack, discharging execrable French.

"No wounded? You tell us that tale every day, and there are always wounded. Do you want any more of them to die? I mean to go on and I shall go on."

I didn't ask him how he thought he could stop one whom Heaven had predestined to go on to Melle.

M. C— had got out now to see the fight.

The Army Medical Officer looked the Secretary and Reporter up and down, taking in that vision of inappropriateness and disproportion. There was a faint, a very faint smile under the ferocity of his moustache, the first sign of relenting. The Secretary and Reporter saw the advantage and followed, as you might follow a bend in the enemy's line of defence.

"I *want* to go on" (placably, almost pathetically). "*Je veux continuer.* Do you by any chance imagine we're *afraid*?"

At this, M. C—, the Belgian guide, smiled too, under a moustache not quite so ferocious as the Army Medical Officer's. They shrugged their shoulders. They had done their duty. Anyhow, they had lost the battle.

The guide and the reporter jumped back into the car; I didn't hear anybody give the order, but the chauffeur Newlands turned her round in no time, and we dashed past the barrier and into Melle.

The village street, that had been raked by mitrailleuses from the field beyond it, was quiet when we came in, and almost deserted. Up a side street, propped against the wall of a stable, four wounded Frenchmen waited for the ambulance. A fifth, shot through the back of his head by a dum–dum bullet, lay in front of them on a stretcher that dripped blood.

I found Mr. Grierson in the village, left behind by the last ambulance. He was immensely astonished at my arrival with the new car. He had with him an eager little Englishman, one of the sort that tracks an ambulance everywhere on the off–chance of being useful.

And the Curé of the village was there. He wore the Red Cross brassard on the sleeve of his cassock and he carried the Host in a little bag of purple silk.

They told me that the village had been fired on by shrapnel a few minutes before we came into it. They said we were only a hundred [?] yards from the German trenches. We could see the edge of the field from the village street. The trenches [?] were at the bottom of it.

It was Baerlaere all over again. The firing stopped as soon as I came within range of it, and didn't begin again until we had got away.

You couldn't take any interest in the firing or the German trenches, or the eager little Englishman, or anything. You couldn't see anything but those five wounded men, or think of anything but how to get them into the ambulance as painlessly and in as short a time as possible.

The man on the dripping stretcher was mortally wounded. He was lifted in first, very slowly and gently.

The Curé climbed in after him, carrying the Host.

He kneeled there while the blood from the wounded head oozed through the bandages and through the canvas of the stretcher to the floor and to the skirts of his cassock.

We waited.

There was no ugly haste in the Supreme Act; the three mortal moments that it lasted (it could not have lasted more) were charged with immortality, while the Curé remained kneeling in the pool of blood.

I shall never become a Catholic. But if I do, it will be because of the Curé of Melle, who turned our new motor ambulance into a sanctuary after the French soldier had baptized it with his blood. I have never seen, I never shall see, anything more beautiful, more gracious than the Soul that appeared in his lean, dark face and in the straight, slender body under the black *soutane*. In his simple, inevitable gestures you saw adoration of God, contempt for death, and uttermost compassion.

It was all over. I received his missal and his bag of purple silk as he gathered his cassock about him and came down.

I asked him if anything could be done. His eyes smiled as he answered. But his lips quivered as he took again his missal and his purple bag.

M. C— is now glad that we went on to Melle.

We helped the four other wounded men in. They sat in a row alongside the stretcher.

I sat on the edge of the ambulance, at the feet of the dying man, by the handles of the stretcher.

At the last minute the Chaplain jumped on to the step. So did the little eager Englishman. Hanging on to the hood and swaying with the rush of the car, he talked continually. He talked from the moment we left Melle to the moment when we landed him at his street in Ghent; explaining over and over again the qualifications that justified him in attaching himself to ambulances. He had lived fourteen years in Ghent. He could speak French and Flemish.

I longed for the eager little Englishman to stop. I longed for his street to come and swallow him up. He had lived in Ghent fourteen years. He could speak Flemish and French. I felt that I couldn't bear it if he went on a minute longer. I wanted to think. The dying man lay close behind me, very straight and stiff; his poor feet stuck out close under my hand.

But I couldn't think. The little eager Englishman went on swaying and talking.

He had lived fourteen years in Ghent.

He could speak French and Flemish.

* * * * *

The dying man was still alive when he was lifted out of the ambulance.

He died that evening.

* * * * *

The Commandant is pleased with his new ambulances. He is not altogether displeased with me.

We must have been very quick. For it was the Commandant's car that we passed at the fork of the road. And either he arrived a few minutes after we got back or we arrived just as he had got in. Anyhow, we met in the porch.

He and Ursula Dearmer and I went back to Melle again at once, in the new car. It was nearly dark when we got there.

We found Mrs. Torrence and little Janet in the village. They and Dr. Wilson had been working all day long picking up wounded off the field outside it. The German lines are not far off—at the bottom of the field. I think only a small number of their guns could rake the main street of the village where we were. Their shell went over our heads and over the roofs of the houses towards the French batteries on this side of the village. There must have been a rush from the German lines across this field, and the French batteries have done their work well, for Mrs. Torrence said the German dead are lying thick there among the turnips. She and Janet and Dr. Wilson had been under fire for eight hours on end, lifting men and carrying stretchers. I don't know whether their figures (the two girls in khaki tunics and breeches) could be seen from the German lines, but they just trudged on between the furrows, and over the turnip–tops, serenely regardless of the enemy, carefully sorting the wounded from the dead, with the bullets whizzing past their noses.

Of bullets Mrs. Torrence said, indeed, that eight hours of them were rather more than she cared for; and of carrying stretchers over a turnip–field, that it was as much as she and Janet

could do. But they came back from it without turning a hair. I have seen women more dishevelled after tramping a turnip–field in a day's partridge–shooting.

They went off somewhere to find Dr. Wilson; and we—Ursula Dearmer, the Commandant and I—hung about the village waiting for the wounded to be brought in. The village was crowded with French and Belgian troops when we came into it. Then they gathered together and went on towards the field, and we followed them up the street. They called to us to stay under cover, or, if we *must*walk up the street, to keep close under the houses, as the bullets might come flying at us any minute.

No bullets came, however. It was like Baerlaere—it was like Lokeren—it was like every place I've been in, so far. Nothing came as long as there was a chance of its getting me.

After that we drove down to the station. While we were hanging about there, a shell was hurled over this side of the village from the German batteries. It careered over the roofs, with a track that was luminous in the dusk, like a curved sheet of lightning. I don't know where it fell and burst.

We were told to stand out from under the station building for fear it should be struck.

When we got back into the village we went into the inn and waited there in a long, narrow room, lit by a few small oil–lamps and crammed with soldiers. They were eating and drinking in vehement haste. Wherever the light from the lamps fell on them, you saw faces flushed and scarred under a blur of smoke and grime. Here and there a bandage showed up, violently white. On the tables enormous quantities of bread appeared and disappeared.

These soldiers, with all their vehemence and violence, were exceedingly lovable. One man brought me a chair; another brought bread and offered it. Charming smiles flashed through the grime.

At last, when we had found one man with a wounded hand, we got into the ambulance and went back to Ghent.

Saturday, 10th

I have got something to do again—at last!

I am to help to look after Mr. —. He has the pick of the Belgian Red Cross women to nurse him, and they are angelically kind and very skilful, but he is not very happy with them. He says: “These dear people are so good to me, but I can’t make out what they say. I can’t tell them what I want.” He is pathetically glad to have any English people with him. (Even I am a little better than a Belgian whom he cannot understand.)

I sat with him all morning. The French boy has gone and he is alone in his room now. It seems that the kind Chaplain sat up with him all last night after his hard day at Melle. (I wish now I had stood by the Chaplain with his Matins. He has never tried to have them again—given us up as an unholy crew, all except Mr. Foster, whom he clings to.)

The morning went like half an hour, while it was going; but when it was over I felt as if I had been nursing for weeks on end. There were so many little things to be done, and so much that you mustn’t do, and the anxiety was appalling. I don’t suppose there is a worse case in the Hospital. He is perhaps a shade better to–day, but none of the medical staff think that he can live.

Madame E— and Dr. Bird have shown me what to do, and what not to do. I must keep him all the time in the same position. I must give him sips of iced broth, and little pieces of ice to suck every now and then. I must not let him try to raise himself in bed. I must not try to lift him myself. If we do lift him we must keep his body tilted at the same angle. I must not give him any hot drinks and not too much cold drink.

And he is six foot high, so tall that his feet come through the blankets at the bottom of the bed; and he keeps sinking down in it all the time and wanting to raise himself up again. And his fever makes him restless. And he is always thirsty and he longs for hot tea more than iced water, and for more iced water than is good for him. The iced broth that is his only nourishment he does not want at all.

And then he must be kept very quiet. I must not let him talk more than is necessary to tell me what he wants, or he will die of exhaustion. And what he wants is to talk every minute that he is awake.

He drops off to sleep, breathing in jerks and with a terrible rapidity. And I think it will be all right as long as he sleeps. But his sleep only lasts for a few minutes. I hear the rhythm of his breathing alter; it slackens and goes slow; then it jerks again, and I know that he is awake.

And then he begins. He says things that tear at your heart. He has looks and gestures that break it—the adorable, wilful smile of a child that knows that it is being watched when you find his hand groping too often for the glass of iced water that stands beside his bed; a still more adorable and utterly gentle submission when you take the glass from him; when you tell him not to say anything more just yet but to go to sleep again. You feel as if you were guilty of act after act of nameless and abominable cruelty.

He sticks to it that he has seen me before, that he has heard of me, that his people know me. And he wants to know what I do and where I live and where it was that he saw me. Once, when I thought he had gone to sleep, I heard him begin again: “Where did you say you lived?”

I tell him. And I tell him to go to sleep again.

He closes his eyes obediently and opens them the next instant.

"I say, may I come and call on you when we get back to England?"

You can only say: "Yes. Of course," and tell him to go to sleep.

His voice is so strong and clear that I could almost believe that he will get back and that some day I shall look up and see him standing at my garden gate.

Mercifully, when I tell him to go to sleep again, he does go to sleep. And his voice is a little clearer and stronger every time he wakes.

And so the morning goes on. The only thing he wants you to do for him is to sponge his hands and face with iced water and to give him little bits of ice to suck. Over and over again I do these things. And over and over again he asks me, "Do you mind?"

* * * * *

He wears a little grey woollen cord round his neck. Something has gone from it. Whatever he has lost, they have left him his little woollen cord, as if some immense importance attached to it.

* * * * *

He has fallen into a long doze. And at the end of the morning I left him sleeping.

Some of the Corps have brought in trophies from the battle–field—a fine grey cloak with a scarlet collar, a spiked helmet, a cuff with three buttons cut from the coat of a dead German.

These things make me sick. I see the body under the cloak, the head under the helmet, and the dead hand under the cuff.

Afternoon

Saw Mr. Foster. He is to be sent back to England for an operation. Dr. Wilson is to take him. He asked me if I thought the Commandant would take him back again when he is better.

Saw the President about Mr. Foster. He will not hear of his going back to England. He wants him to stay in the Hospital and be operated on here. He promises the utmost care and attention. He is most distressed to think that he should go.

It doesn't occur to him in his kindness that it would be much more distressing if the Germans came into Ghent and interrupted the operation.

Cabled Miss F. about her Glasgow ambulance, asking her to pay her staff if her funds ran to it. Cabled British Red Cross to send Mr. Gould and his scouting–car here instead of to France. Cabled Mr. Gould to get the British Red Cross to send him here.

Mr. Lambert has been ill with malaria. He has gone back to England to get well again and to repair the car that broke down at Lokeren.[22]

Somebody else is to look after Mr. — this afternoon.

[22] The fate of "Mr. Lambert" and the scouting–car was one of those things that ought never to have happened. It turned out that the car was not the property of his paper, but his own car, hired and maintained by him at great expense; that this brave and devoted young American had joined our Corps before it left England and gone out to the front to wait for us. And he was kept waiting long after we got there.
But if he didn't see as much service at Ghent as he undertook to see (though he did some fine things on his own even there), it was made up to him in Flanders afterwards, when, with the Commandant and other members of the Corps, he distinguished himself by his gallantry at Furnes and in the Battle of Dixmude.
For an account of his wife's services see Postscript.

I have been given leave rather reluctantly to sit up with him at night.

The Commandant is going to take me in Tom's Daimler (Car 1) to the British lines to look for a base for that temporary hospital which is still running in his head like a splendid dream. I do not see how, with the Germans at Melle, only four and a half miles off, any sort of hospital is to be established on this side of Ghent.

Tom, the chauffeur, does not look with favour on the expedition. I have had to point out to him that a Field Ambulance is *not*, as he would say, the House of Commons, and that there is a certain propriety binding even on a chauffeur and a limit to the freedom of the speech you may apply to your Commandant. This afternoon Tom has exceeded all the limits. The worst of Tom is that while his tongue rages on the confines of revolt, he himself is punctilious to excess on the point of orders. Either he has orders or he hasn't them. If he has them he obeys them with a punctuality that puts everybody else in the wrong. If he hasn't them, an earthquake wouldn't make him move. Such is his devotion to orders that he will insist on any one order holding good for an unlimited time after it has been given.

So now, in defence of his manners, he urges that what with orders and counter–orders, the provocation is more than flesh and blood can stand. Tom himself is protest clothed in flesh and blood.

To–day at two o'clock Tom's orders are that his car is to be ready at two–thirty. My orders are to be ready in twenty minutes. I *am* ready in twenty minutes. The Commandant thinks that he has transacted all his business and is ready in twenty minutes too. Tom and his car are nowhere to be seen. I go to look for Tom. Tom is reported as being last seen riding on a motor–lorry towards the British lines in the company of a detachment of British infantry.

The chauffeur Tom is considered to have disgraced himself everlastingly.

Punctually at two–thirty he appears with his car at the door of the "Flandria."

The Commandant is nowhere to be seen. He has gone to look for Tom.

I reprove Tom for the sin of unpunctuality, and he has me.

His orders were to be ready at two–thirty and he is ready at two–thirty. And it is nobody's business what he did with himself ten minutes before. He wants to know where the Commandant is.

I go to look for the Commandant.

The Commandant is reported to have been last seen going through the Hospital on his way to the garage. I go round to the garage through the Hospital; and the Commandant goes out of the garage by the street. He was last seen *in* the garage.

He appears suddenly from some quarter where you wouldn't expect him in the least. He reproves Tom.

Tom with considerable violence declares his righteousness. He has gathered to himself a friend, a Belgian Red Cross man, whose language he does not understand. But they exchange winks that surpass all language.

Then the Commandant remembers that he has several cables to send off. He is seen disappearing in the direction of the Post and Telegraph Office.

Tom swallows words that would be curses if I were not there.

I keep my eyes fixed on the doors of the Post Office. Ages pass.

I go to the Post Office to look for the Commandant. He is not in the Telegraph Office. He is not in the Post Office. Tom keeps his eyes on the doors of both.

More ages pass. Finally, the Commandant appears from inside the Hospital, which he has not been seen to enter.

The chauffeur Tom dismounts and draws from his car's mysterious being sounds that express the savage fury of his resentment.

You would think we were off now. But we only get as far as a street somewhere near the Hôtel de la Poste. Here we wait for apparently no reason in such tension that you can hear the ages pass.

The Commandant disappears.

Tom says something about there being no room for the wounded at this rate.

It seems his orders are to go first to the British lines at a place whose name I forget, and then on to Melle.

I remember Tom's views on the subject of field–women. And suddenly I seem to understand them. Tom is very like Lord Kitchener. He knows nothing about the aims and wants of modern womanhood and he cares less. The modern woman does not ask to be protected, does not want to be protected, and Tom, like Lord Kitchener, will go on protecting. You cannot elevate men like Lord Kitchener and Tom above the primitive plane of chivalry. Tom in the danger zone with a woman by his side feels about as peaceful and comfortable as a woman in the danger zone with a two–year–old baby in her lap. A bomb in his bedroom is one thing and a band of drunken Uhlans making for his women is another. Tom's nerves are racked with problems: How the dickens is he to steer his car and protect his women at the same time? And if it comes to a toss–up between his women and his wounded? You've got to stow the silly things somewhere, and every one of them takes up the place of a wounded man.

I get out of the car and tell the Commandant that I would rather not go than take up the place of a wounded man.

He orders me back to the car again. Tom seems inclined to regard me as a woman who has done her best.

We go on a little way and stop again. And there springs out of the pavement a curious figure that I have seen somewhere before in Ghent, I cannot remember when or where. The figure wears a check suit of extreme horsyness and carries a kodak in its hand. It is excited.

There is something about it that reminds me now of the eager little Englishman at Melle. These figures spring up everywhere in the track of a field ambulance.

When Tom sees it he groans in despair.

The Commandant gets out and appears to be offering it the hospitality of the car. I am introduced.

To my horror the figure skips round in front of the car, levels its kodak at my head and implores me to sit still.

I am very rude. I tell it sternly to take that beastly thing away and go away itself.

It goes, rather startled.

And we get off, somehow, without it, and arrive at the end of the street.

Here Tom has orders to stop at the first hat–shop he comes to.

The Commandant has lost his hat at Melle (he has been wearing little Janet's Arctic cap, to the delight of everybody). He has just remembered that he wants a hat and he thinks that he will get it now.

At this point I break down. I hear myself say "Damn" five times, softly but distinctly. (This after reproving Tom for unfettered speech and potential insubordination.)

Tom stops at a hat–shop. The Commandant to his doom enters, and presently returns wearing a soft felt hat of a vivid green. He asks me what I think of it.

I tell him all I think of it, and he says that if I feel like that about it he'll go in again and get another one.

I forget what I said then except that I wanted to get on to Melle. That Melle was the place of all places where I most wished to be.

Then, lest he might feel unhappy in his green hat, I said that if he would leave it out all night in the rain and then sit on it no doubt time and weather and God would do something for it.

This time we were off, and when I realized it I said "Hurray!"[23]

Tom had not said anything for some considerable time.

We found the British lines in a little village just outside of Ghent. No place there for a base hospital.

We hung about here for twenty minutes, and the women and children came out to stare at us with innocent, pathetic faces.

Somebody had stowed away one of the trophies—the spiked German helmet—in the ambulance car, and the chauffeur Tom stuck it on a stick and held it up before the British lines. It was greeted with cheers and a great shout of laughter from the troops; and the villagers came running out of their houses to look; they uttered little sharp and guttural cries of satisfaction. The whole thing was a bit savage and barbaric and horribly impressive.

Finally we left the British lines and set out towards Melle by a cross–road.

We got through all right. A thousand accidents may delay his going, but once off, no barriers exist for the Commandant. Seated in the front of the car, utterly unperturbed by the chauffeur Tom's sarcastic comments on men, things and women, wrapped (apparently) in a beautiful dream, he looks straight ahead with eyes whose vagueness veils a deadly simplicity of purpose. I marvel at the transfiguration of the Commandant. Before the War he was a fairly complex personality. Now he has ceased to exist as a separate individual. He is merged, vaguely and vastly, in his adventure. He is the Motor Ambulance Field Corps; he is the ambulance car; he is the electric spark and the continuous explosion that drives the thing along. It is useless to talk to him about anything that happened before the War or about anything that exists outside it. He would not admit that anything did exist outside it. He is capable of forgetting the day of the week and the precise number of female units in his company and the amount standing to his credit at his banker's, but, once off, he is cock–sure of the shortest cut to the firing–line within a radius of fifty kilometres.

Some of us who have never seen a human phenomenon of this sort are ready to deny him an identity. They complain of his inveterate and deplorable lack of any sense of detail. This is absurd. You might as well insist on a faithful representation of the household furniture of the

[23] I record these details (March 11th, 1915) because the Commandant accused me subsequently of a total lack of "balance" upon this occasion.

burgomaster of Zoetenaeg, which is the smallest village in Belgium, in drawing the map of Europe to scale. At the critical moment this more than continental vastness gathers to a wedge–like determination that goes home. He means to get through.

We ran into Melle about an hour before sunset.

There had been a great slaughter of Germans on the field outside the village where the Germans were still firing when the Corps left it. We found two of our cars drawn up by the side of the village street, close under the houses. The Chaplain, Ursula Dearmer and Mrs. Lambert were waiting in one of them, the new Daimler, with the chauffeur Newlands. Dr. Wilson was in Bert's car with three wounded Germans. He was sitting in front with one of them beside him. They say that the enemy's wounded sometimes fire on our surgeons and Red Cross men, and Dr. Wilson had a revolver about him when he went on the battle–field yesterday. He said he wasn't taking any risks. The man he had got beside him to–day was only wounded in the foot, and had his hands entirely free to do what he liked with. He looked rather a low type, and at the first sight of him I thought I shouldn't have cared to be alone with him anywhere on a dark night.

And then I saw the look on his face. He was purely pathetic. He didn't look at you. He stared in front of him down the road towards Ghent, in a dull, helpless misery. These unhappy German Tommies are afraid of us. They are told that we shall treat them badly, and some of them believe it. I wanted Dr. Wilson to let me get up and go with the poor fellow, but he wouldn't. He was sorry for him and very gentle. He is always sorry for people and very gentle. So I knew that the German would be all right with him. But I should have liked to have gone.

We found Mrs. Torrence and Janet with M. — on the other side of the street, left behind by Dr. Wilson. They have been working all day yesterday and half the night and all this morning and afternoon on that hideous turnip–field. They have seen things and combinations of things that no forewarning imagination could have devised. Last night the car was fired on where it stood waiting for them in the village, and they had to race back to it under a shower of bullets.

They were as fresh as paint and very cheerful. Mrs. Torrence was wearing a large silver order on a broad blue ribbon pinned to her khaki overcoat. It was given to her to–day as the reward of valour by the Belgian General in command here. Somebody took it from the breast of a Prussian officer. She had covered it up with her khaki scarf so that she might not seem to swank.

Little Janet was with her. She always is with her. She looked younger than ever, more impassive than ever, more adorable than ever. I have got used to Mrs. Torrence and to Ursula Dearmer; but I cannot get used to Janet. It always seems appalling to me that she should be here, strolling about the seat of War with her hands in her pockets, as if a battle were a cricket–match at which you looked on between your innings. And yet there isn't a man in the Corps who does his work better, and with more courage and endurance, than this eighteen–year–old child.

They told us that there were no French or Belgian wounded left, but that two wounded Germans were still lying over there among the turnips. They were waiting for our car to come out and take these men up. The car was now drawn up close under some building that looked like a town hall, on the other side of the street. We were in the middle of the village. The village itself was the extreme fringe of the danger zone. Where the houses ended, a stretch of white road ran up for about [?] a hundred yards to the turnip–field. Standing in the village

street, we could see the turnip–field, but not all of it. The road goes straight up to the edge of it and turns there with a sweep to the left and runs alongside for about a mile and a half.

On the other side of the turnip–field were the German lines. The first that had raked the village street also raked the fields and the mile and a half of road alongside.

It was along that road that the car would have to go.

M. — told our Ambulance that it might as well go back. There were no more wounded. Only two Germans lying in a turnip–field. The three of us—Mrs. Torrence and Janet and I—tried to bring pressure to bear on M. —. We meant to go and get those Germans.

But M. — was impervious to pressure. He refused either to go with the car himself or to let us go. He said we were too late and it was too far and there wouldn't be light enough. He said that for two Belgians, or two French, or two British, it would be worth while taking risks. But for two Germans under German fire it wasn't good enough.

But Mrs. Torrence and Janet and I didn't agree with him. Wounded were wounded. We said we were going if he wasn't.

Then the chauffeur Tom joined in. He refused to offer his car as a target for the enemy.[24] Our firm Belgian was equally determined. The Commandant, as if roused from his beautiful dream to a sudden realization of the horrors of war, absolutely forbade the expedition.

It took place all the same.

Tom's car, planted there on our side of the street, hugging the wall, with its hood over its eyes, preserved its attitude of obstinate immobility. Newlands' car, hugging the wall on the other side of the street, stood discreetly apart from the discussion. But a Belgian military ambulance car ran up, smaller and more alert than ours. And a Belgian Army Medical Officer strolled up to see what was happening.

We three advanced on that Army Medical Officer, Mrs. Torrence and Janet on his left and I on his right.

I shall always be grateful to that righteous man. He gave Mrs. Torrence and Janet leave to go, and he gave me leave to go with them; he gave us the military ambulance to go in and a Belgian soldier with a rifle to protect us. And he didn't waste a second over it. He just looked at us, and smiled, and let us go.

Mrs. Torrence got on to the ambulance beside the driver, Janet jumped on to one step and I on to the other, while the Commandant came up, trying to look stern, and told me to get down.

I hung on all the tighter.

And then—

What happened then was so ignominious, so sickening, that, if I were not sworn to the utmost possible realism in this record, I should suppress it in the interests of human dignity.

Mrs. Torrence, having the advantage of me in weight, height, muscle and position, got up and tried to push me off the step. As she did this she said: "You can't come. You'll take up the place of a wounded man."

[24] This is no reflection on Tom's courage. His chief objection was to driving three women so near the German lines. The same consideration probably weighed with the Commandant and M. —.

And I found myself standing in the village street, while the car rushed out of it, with Janet clinging on to the hood, like a little sailor to his shrouds. She was on the side next the German guns.

It was the most revolting thing that had happened to me yet, in a life filled with incidents that I have no desire to repeat. And it made me turn on the Commandant in a way that I do not like to think of. I believe I asked him how he could bear to let that kid go into the German lines, which was exactly what the poor man hadn't done.[25]

Then we waited, Mrs. Lambert and I in Tom's car; and the Commandant in the car with Ursula Dearmer and the Chaplain on the other side of the street.

We were dreadfully silent now. We stared at objects that had no earthly interest for us as if our lives depended on mastering their detail. We were thus aware of a beautiful little Belgian house standing back from the village street down a short turning, a cream–coloured house with green shutters and a roof of rose–red tiles, and a very small poplar tree mounting guard beside it. This house and its tree were vivid and very still. They stood back in an atmosphere of their own, an atmosphere of perfect but utterly unreal peace. And as long as our memories endure, that house which we never saw before, and shall probably never see again, is bound up with the fate of Mrs. Torrence and Janet McNeil.

We thought we should have an hour to wait before they came back, if they ever did come. We waited for them during a whole dreadful lifetime.

* * * * *

In something less than half an hour the military ambulance came swinging round the turn of the road, with Mrs. Torrence and the Kid, and the two German wounded with them on the stretchers.

Those Germans never thought that they were going to be saved. They couldn't get over it—that two Englishwomen should have gone through their fire, for them! As they were being carried through the fire they said: "We shall never forget what you've done for us. God will bless you for it."

Mrs. Torrence asked them, "What will you do for us if we are taken prisoner?"

And they said: "We will do all we can to save you."

* * * * *

Antwerp is said to have fallen.

Antwerp is said to be holding its own well.[26]

All evening the watching Taube has been hanging over Ghent.

Mrs. Torrence and Janet have gone back with the ambulance to Melle.

Night

Sat up all night with Mr. —.

There is one night nurse for all the wards on this floor, and she has a serious case to watch in another room. But I can call her if I want help. And there is the chemist who sleeps in the

[25] The whole thing was a piece of rank insubordination. The Commandant was entirely right to forbid the expedition, and we were entirely wrong in disobeying him. But it was one of those wrong things that I would do again to–morrow.

[26] Antwerp had surrendered on Friday, the 9th.

room next door, who will come if I go in and wake him up. And there are our own four doctors upstairs. And the *infirmiers*. It ought to be all right.

As a matter of fact it was the most terrible night I have ever spent in my life; and I have lived through a good many terrible nights in sick–rooms. But no amount of amateur nursing can take the place of training or of the self–confidence of knowing you are trained. And even if you *are* trained, no amount of medical nursing will prepare you for a bad surgical case. To begin with, I had never nursed a patient so tall and heavy that I couldn't lift him by sheer strength and a sort of amateur knack.

And though in theory it was reassuring to know that you could call the night nurse and the chemist and the four doctors and the *infirmiers*, in practice it didn't work out quite so easily as it sounded. When the night nurse came she couldn't lift any more than I could; and she had a greater command of discouraging criticism than of useful, practical suggestion. And the chemist knew no more about lifting than the night nurse. (Luckily none of us pretended for an instant that we knew!) When I had called up two of our hard–worked surgeons each once out of his bed, I had some scruples about waking them again. And it took four Belgian *infirmiers* to do in five minutes what one surgeon could do in as many seconds. And when the chemist went to look for the *infirmiers* he was gone for ages—he must have had to round them up from every floor in the Hospital. Whenever any of them went to look for anything, it took them ages. It was as if for every article needed in the wards of that Hospital there was a separate and inaccessible central depôt.[27]

At one moment a small pillow had to be placed in the hollow of my patient's back if he was to be kept in that position on which I had been told his life depended. When I sent the night nurse to look for something that would serve, she was gone a quarter of an hour, in which I realized that my case was not the only case in the Hospital. For a quarter of an hour I had to kneel by his bed with my two arms thrust together under the hollow of his back, supporting it. I had nothing at hand that was small enough or firm enough but my arms.

That night I would have given everything I possess, and everything I have ever done, to have been a trained nurse.

To make matters worse, I had an atrocious cough, acquired at the Hôtel de la Poste. The chemist had made up some medicine for it, but the poor busy dispensary clerk had forgotten to send it to my room. I had to stop it by an expenditure of will when I wanted every atom of will to keep my patient quiet and send him to sleep, if possible, without his morphia *piqûres*. He is only to have one if he is restless or in pain.

And to–night he wanted more than ever to talk when he woke. And his conversation in the night is even more lacerating than his conversation in the day. For all the time, often in pain, always in extreme discomfort, he is thinking of other people.

First of all he asked me if I had any books, and I thought that he wanted me to read to him. I told him I was afraid he mustn't be read to, he must go to sleep. And he said: "I mean for you to read yourself—to pass the time."

He is afraid that I shall be bored by sitting up with him, that I shall tire myself, that I shall make my cough worse. He asks me if I think he will ever be well enough to play games. That is what he has always wanted to do most.

And then he begins to tell me about his mother.

[27] All the same it was splendidly equipped and managed.

He tells me things that I have no right to put down here.

There is nothing that I can do for him but to will. And I will hard, or I pray—I don't know which it is; your acutest willing and your intensest prayer are indistinguishable. And it seems to work. I will—or I pray—that he shall lie still without morphia, and that he shall have no pain. And he lies still, without pain. I will—or I pray—that he shall sleep without morphia. And he sleeps (I think that in spite of his extreme discomfort, he must have slept the best part of the night). And because it seems to work, I will—or I pray—that he shall get well.

There are many things that obstruct this process as fast as it is begun: your sensation of sight and touch; the swarms and streams of images that your brain throws out; and the crushing obsession of your fear. This last is like a dead weight that you hold off you with your arms stretched out. Your arms sink and drop under it perpetually and have to be raised again. At last the weight goes. And the sensations go, and the swarms and streams of images go, and there is nothing before you and around you but a clear blank darkness where your will vibrates.

Only one avenue of sense is left open. You are lost to the very memories of touch and sight, but you are intensely conscious of every sound from the bed, every movement of the sleeper. And while one half of you only lives in that pure and effortless vibration, the other half is aware of the least change in the rhythm of his breathing.

It is by this rhythm that I can tell whether he is asleep or awake. This rhythm of his breathing, and the rhythm of his sleeping and his waking measure out the night for me. It goes like one hour.

And yet I have spent months of nights watching in this room. Its blond walls are as familiar to me as the walls of rooms where I have lived a long time; I know with a profound and intimate knowledge every crinkle in the red shade of the electric bulb that hangs on the inner wall between the two beds, the shape and position of every object on the night table in the little white–tiled dressing–room; I know every trick of the inner and outer doors leading to the corridor, and the long grey lane of the corridor, and the room that I must go through to find ice, and the face of the little ward–maid who sleeps there, who wants to get up and break the ice for me every time. I have known the little ward–maid all my life; I have known the night nurse all my life, with her white face and sharp black eyes, and all my life I have not cared for her. All my life I have known and cared only for the wounded man on the bed.

I have known every sound of his voice and every line of his face and hands (the face and hands that he asks me to wash, over and over again, if I don't mind), and the strong springing of his dark hair from his forehead and every little feathery tuft of beard on his chin. And I have known no other measure of time than the rhythm of his breathing, no mark or sign of time than the black crescent of his eyelashes when the lids are closed, and the curling blue of his eyes when they open. His eyes always smile as they open, as if he apologized for waking when he knows that I want him to sleep. And I have known these things so long that each one of them is already like a separate wound in my memory.[28] He sums up for me all the heroism and the agony and waste of the defence of Antwerp, all the heroism and agony and waste of war.

About midnight [?] he wakes and tells me he has had a jolly dream. He dreamed that he was running in a field in England, running in a big race, that he led the race and won it.

[28] Even now, when I am asked if I did any nursing when I was in Belgium I have to think before I answer: "Only for one morning and one night"—it would still be much truer to say, "I was nursing all the time."

Sunday, 11th

One bad symptom is disappearing. Towards dawn it has almost gone. He really does seem stronger.

5 A.M

He has had no return of pain or restlessness. But he was to have a morphia *piqûre* at five o'clock, and they have given it to him to make sure.

8 A.M

The night has not been so terrible, after all. It has gone like an hour and I have left him sleeping.

I am not in the least bit tired; I never felt drowsy once, and my cough has nearly gone.

* * * * *

Antwerp has fallen.

Taube over Ghent in the night.

Six doctors have seen Mr. —. They all say he is ever so much better. They even say he may live—that he has a good chance.

Dr. Wilson is taking Mr. Foster to England this morning.

Went back to the Hôtel Cecil to sleep for an hour or two. An enormous oval table–top is leaning flat against the wall; but by no possibility can it be set up. Still, the landlord said he would find a table, and he has found one.

Went back to the "Flandria" for lunch. In the mess–room Janet tells me that Mr. —'s case has been taken out of my hands. I am not to try to do any more nursing.

Little Janet looks as if she were trying to soften a blow. But it isn't a blow. Far from it. It is the end of an intolerable responsibility.

The Commandant and the Chaplain started about nine or ten this morning for Melle, and are not back yet.

We expect that we may have to clear out of Ghent before to–morrow.

Mr. Riley, Mrs. Lambert and Janet have gone in the second car to Melle.

I waited in all afternoon on the chance of being taken when the Commandant comes and goes out again.

4.45

He is not back yet. I am very anxious. The Germans may be in Melle by now.

One of the old officials in peaked caps has called on me solemnly this afternoon. He is the most mysterious of them all, an old man with a white moustache, who never seems to do anything but hang about. He is certainly not an *infirmier*. He called ostensibly to ask some question and remained to talk. I think he thought he would pump me. He began by asking if we women enjoyed going out with the Field Ambulance; he supposed we felt very daring and looked on the whole thing as an adventure. I detected some sinister intention, and replied that that was not exactly the idea; that our women went out to help to save the lives of the

wounded soldiers, and that they had succeeded in this object over and over again; and that I didn't imagine they thought of anything much except their duty. We certainly were not out for amusement.

Then he took another line. He told me that the reason why our Ambulance is to be put under the charge of the British General here (we had heard that the whole of the Belgian Army was shortly to be under the control of the British, and the whole of the Belgian Red Cross with it)—the reason is that its behaviour in going into the firing–line has been criticized. And when I ask him on what grounds, it turns out that somebody thinks there is a risk of our Ambulance drawing down the fire on the lines it serves. I told him that in all the time I had been with the Ambulance it had never placed itself in any position that could possibly have drawn down fire on the Belgians, and that I had never heard of any single instance of this danger; and I made him confess that there was no proof or even rumour of any single instance when it had occurred. I further told the old gentleman very plainly that these things ought not to be said or repeated, and that every man and woman in the English Ambulance would rather lose their own life than risk that of one Belgian soldier.

The old gentleman was somewhat flattened out before he left me; having "*parfaitement compris*."

It is a delicious idea that Kitchener and Joffre should be reorganizing the Allied Armies because of the behaviour of our Ambulance.

There are Gordon Highlanders in Ghent.[29]

* * * * *

Went over to the Couvent de Saint Pierre, where Miss Ashley–Smith is with her British wounded. I had to warn her that the Germans may come in to–night. I had told the Commandant about her yesterday, and arranged with him that we should take her and her British away in our Ambulance if we have to go. I had to find out how many there would be to take.

The Convent is a little way beyond the *Place* on the boulevard. I knew it by the Red Cross hanging from the upper windows. Everything is as happy and peaceful here as if Ghent were not on the eve of an invasion. The nuns took me to Miss Ashley–Smith in her ward. I hardly knew her, for she had changed the uniform of the British Field Hospital[30] for the white linen of the Belgian Red Cross. I found her in charge of the ward. Absolutely unperturbed by the news, she went on superintending the disposal of a table of surgical instruments. She would not consent to come with us at first. But the nuns persuaded her that she would do no good by remaining.

I am to come again and tell her what time to be ready with her wounded, when we know whether we are going and when.

Came back to the "Flandria" and finished entries in my Day–Book.

Evening

The Commandant has come back from Melle; but he is going there again almost directly. He has been to the British lines, and heard for certain that the Germans will be in Ghent before morning. We have orders to clear out before two in the morning. I am to have all his things packed by midnight.

[29] My Day–Book ends abruptly here; and I have no note of the events that followed.
[30] Incorrect. It was, I believe, the uniform of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry Corps.

The British Consul has left Ghent.

The news spread through the “Flandria.”

Max has gone about all day with a scared, white face. They say he is suffering from cold feet. But I will not believe it. He has just appeared in the mess–room and summoned me mysteriously. He takes me along the corridor to that room of his which he is so proud of. There is a brand–new uniform lying on the bed, the uniform of a French soldier of the line. Max handles it with love and holy adoration, as a priest handles his sacred vestments. He takes it in his arms, he spreads before me the grey–blue coat, the grey–blue trousers, and his queer eyes are in their solemnity large and quiet as dark moons.

Max is going to rejoin his regiment.

It is sheer nervous excitement that gave him that wild, white face.

Max is confident that we shall meet again; and I have a horrid vision of Max carried on a bloody stretcher, a brutally wounded Max.

He has given me his address in Brussels, which will not find him there for long enough: if ever.

Jean also is to rejoin his regiment.

Marie, the *bonne*, stands at the door of the service room and watches us with frightened eyes. She follows me into the mess–room and shuts the door. The poor thing has been seized with panic, and her one idea is to get away from Ghent. Can I find a place for her on one of our ambulance cars? She will squeeze in anywhere, she will stand outside on the step. Will I take her back to England? She will do any sort of work, no matter what, and she won’t ask for wages if only I will take her there. I tell her we are not going to England. We are going to Bruges. We have to follow the Belgian Army wherever it is sent.

Then will I take her to Bruges? She has a mother there.

It is ghastly. I have to tell her that it is impossible; that there will be no place for her in the ambulance cars, that they will be crammed with wounded, that we will have to stand on the steps ourselves, that I do not know how many we shall have to take from the Convent, or how many from the hospitals; that I can do nothing without the Commandant’s orders, and that the Commandant is not here. And she pleads and implores. She cannot believe that we can be so cruel, and I find my voice growing hard and stern with sheer, wrenching pity. At last I tell her that if there is room I will see what can be done, but that I am afraid that there will not be room. She stays, she clings, trying to extort through pity a more certain promise, and I have to tell her to go. She goes, looking at me with the dull resentment of a helpless creature whom I have hurt. The fact that she has left me sick with pity will not do her any good. Nothing can do her any good but that place on the ambulance which I have no power to give her.

For Marie is not the only one.

I see all the servants in the “Flandria” coming to me before the night is over, and clinging and pleading for a place in the ambulance cars.

And this is only the beginning. After Marie comes Janet McNeil. She, poor child, has surrendered to the overpowering assault on her feelings and has pledged herself to smuggle the four young children of Madame — into the ambulance somehow. I don’t see how it was possible for her to endure the agony of refusing this request. But what we are to do with four young children in cars packed with wounded soldiers, through all the stages of the Belgian Army’s retreat—!

The next problem that faced me was the Commandant's packing—how to get all the things he had brought with him into one small Gladstone bag and a sleeping–sack. There was a blue serge suit, two sleeping–suits, a large Burberry, a great many pocket–handkerchiefs, socks and stockings, an assortment of neckties, a quantity of small miscellaneous objects whose fugitive tendencies he proposed to frustrate by confinement in a large tin biscuit–box; there was the biscuit–box itself, a tobacco tin, a packet of Gillette razors, a pipe, a leather case containing some electric apparatus, and a fat scarlet volume: Freud's "Psychopathology of Everyday Life." All these things he had pointed out to me as they lay flung on the bed or strewn about the room. He had impressed on me the absolute necessity of packing every one of them, and by the pathetic grouping around the Gladstone bag of the biscuit–box, the tobacco–tin, the case of instruments and Freud, I gathered that he believed that they would all enter the bag placably and be contained in it with ease.

The night is still young.

I pack the Gladstone bag. By alternate coaxing and coercion Freud and the tobacco–tin and the biscuit–box occupy it amicably enough; but the case of instruments offers an unconquerable resistance.

The night is not quite so young as it has been, and I think I must have left off packing to run over to the Hôtel Cecil and pay my bill; for I remember going out into the *Place* and seeing a crowd drawn up in the middle of it before the "Flandria." An official was addressing this crowd, ordering them to give up their revolvers and any arms they had on them.

The fate of Ghent depends on absolute obedience to this order.

When I get back I find Mrs. Torrence downstairs in the hall of the "Flandria." I ask her what we had better do about our refugee children. She says we can do nothing. There must be no refugee children. How *can* there be in an ambulance packed with wounded men? When I tell her that the children will certainly be there if somebody doesn't do something to stop them, she goes off to do it. I do not envy her her job. She is not enjoying it herself. First of all she has got to break it to Janet. And Janet will have to break it to the mother.

As to poor Marie, she is out of the question. *I* shall have to break it to Marie.

The night goes on. I sit with Mr. — for a little while. I have still to finish the Commandant's packing; I have not yet begun my own, and it is time that I should go round to the Convent to tell Miss Ashley–Smith to be ready with her British before two o'clock.

I sit with him for what seems a very long time. It is appalling to me that the time should seem long. For it is really such a little while, and when it is over there will be nothing more that I shall ever do for him. This thought is not prominent and vivid; it is barely discernible; but it is there, a dull background of pain under my anxiety for the safety of the English over there in the Couvent de Saint Pierre. It is more than time that I should go and tell them to be ready.

He holds out his hands to be sponged "if I don't mind." I sponge them over and over again with iced water and eau de Cologne, gently and very slowly. I am afraid lest he should be aware that there is any hurry. The time goes on, and my anxiety becomes acuter every minute, till with each slow, lingering turn of my hand I think, "If I don't go soon it will be too late."

I hear that the children will be all right. Somebody has had a *crise de nerfs*, and Janet was the victim.

It is past midnight, and very dark. The *Place* and the boulevards are deserted. I cannot see the Red Cross flag hanging from the window of the Convent. The boulevards look all the same in

the blackness, and I turn up the one to the left. I run on and on very fast, but I cannot see the white flag with the red cross anywhere; I run back, thinking I must have passed it, turn and go on again.

There is nobody in sight. No sound anywhere but the sound of my own feet running faster and faster up the wrong boulevard.

At last I know I have gone too far, the houses are entirely strange. I run back to the *Place* to get my bearings, and start again. I run faster than ever. I pass a solitary civilian coming down the boulevard. The place is so empty and so still that he and I seem to be the only things alive and awake in this quarter of the town. As I pass he turns to look after me, wondering at the solitary lady running so fast at this hour of the morning. I see the Red Cross flag in the distance, and I come to a door that looks like the door of the Convent. It *is* the door of the Convent.

I ring the bell. I ring it many times. Nobody comes.

I ring a little louder. A tired lay sister puts her head out of an upper window and asks me what I want. I tell her. She is rather cross and says I've come to the wrong door. I must go to the second door; and she puts her head in and shuts the window with a clang that expresses her just resentment.

I go to the second door, and ring many times again. And another lay sister puts her head out of an upper window.

She is gentle but sleepy and very slow. She cannot take it in all at once. She says they are all asleep in the Convent, and she does not like to wake them. She says this several times, so that I may understand.

I am exasperated.

"*Mais, Madame—de grâce! C'est peut–être la vie ou la mort!*"

The minute I've said it it sounds to me melodramatic and absurd. *I* am melodramatic and absurd, with my running feet, and my small figure and earnest, upturned face, standing under a Convent wall at midnight, and talking about *la vie et la mort*. It is too improbable. *I* am too improbable. I feel that I am making a fuss out of all proportion to the occasion. And I am sorry for frightening the poor lay sister all for nothing.

Very soon, down the south–east road, the Germans will be marching upon Ghent.

And I cannot realize it. The whole thing is too improbable.

But the lay sister has understood this time. She will go and wake the porteress. She is not at all frightened.

I wait a little longer, and presently the porteress opens the door. When she hears my message she goes away, and returns after a little while with one of the nuns.

They are very quiet, very kind, and absolutely unafraid. They say that Miss Ashley–Smith and her British wounded shall be ready before [?] two o'clock.

I go back to the "Flandria."

The Commandant, who went out to Melle in Tom's car, has not come back yet.

I think Ursula Dearmer and Mrs. Lambert have gone to bed. They are not taking the Germans very seriously.

There is nobody in the mess–room but the other three chauffeurs, Bert, Tom and Newlands. Newlands has just come back from Ostend. They have had no supper. We bustle about to find some.

We all know the Germans are coming into Ghent. But we do not speak of it. We are all very polite, almost supernaturally gentle, and very kind to each other. The beautiful manners of Newlands are conspicuous in this hour, the tragedy of which we are affecting to ignore. I behave as if there was nothing so important in the world as cutting bread for Newlands. Newlands behaves as if there were nothing so important as fetching a bottle of formamint, which he has with him, to cure my cough. (It has burst out again worse than ever after the unnatural repression of last night.)

When the chauffeurs are provided with supper I go into the Commandant's room and finish his packing. The ties, the pocket–handkerchiefs and the collars are all safe in the Gladstone bag. Only the underclothing and the suits remain and there is any amount of room for them in the hold–all.

I roll up the blue serge coat, and the trousers, and the waistcoat very smooth and tight, also the underclothes. It seems very simple. I have only got to put them in the hold–all and then roll it up, smooth and tight, too—

It would have been simple, if the hold–all had been a simple hold–all and if it had been nothing more. But it was also a sleeping–bag and a field–tent. As sleeping–bag, it was provided with a thick blanket which took up most of the room inside, and a waterproof sheet which was part of itself. As field–tent, it had large protruding flanges, shaped like jib–sails, and a complicated system of ropes.

First of all I tucked in the jib–sails and ropes and laid them as flat as might be on the bottom of the sleeping–bag, with the blanket on the top of them. Then I packed the clothes on the top of the blanket and turned it over them to make all snug; I buttoned up the waterproof sheet over everything, rolled up the hold–all and secured it with its straps. This was only done by much stratagem and strength, by desperate tugging and pushing, and by lying flat on my waist on the rolled–up half to keep it quiet while I brought the loose half over. No sooner had I secured the hold–all by its straps than I realized that it was no more a hold–all than it was a sleeping–bag and a field tent, and that its contents were exposed to the weather down one side, where they bulged through the spaces that yawned between the buttons, strained almost to bursting.

I still believed in the genius that had devised this trinity. Clearly the jib–sails which made it a field–tent were intended to serve also as the pockets of the hold–all. I had done wrong to flatten them out and tuck them in, frustrating the fulfilment of their function. It was not acting fairly by the inventor.

I unpacked the hold–all, I mean the field–tent.

Then, with the Commandant's clothes again lying round me on the floor, I grappled with the mystery of the jib–sails and their cords. The jib–sails and their cords were, so to speak, the heart of this infernal triple entity.

They were treacherous. They had all the appearance of pockets, but owing to the intricate and malign relations of their cords, it was impossible to deal faithfully with them on this footing. When the contents had been packed inside them, the field–tent asserted itself as against the hold–all and refused to roll up. And I am sure that if the field–tent had had to be set up in a field in a hurry, the hold–all and the sleeping–bag would have arisen and insisted on their consubstantial rights.

I unpacked the field–tent and packed it all over again exactly as I had packed it before, but more carefully, swearing gently and continuously, as I tugged with my arms and pushed with my knees, and pressed hard on it with my waist to keep it still. I cursed the day when I had first heard of it; I cursed myself for giving it to the Commandant; more than all I cursed the combined ingenuity and levity of its creator, who had indulged his fantasy at our expense, without a thought to the actual conditions of the retreat of armies and of ambulances.

And in the middle of it all Janet came in, and curled herself up in a corner, and forecast luridly and inconsolably the possible fate of her friends, the nurses in the "Flandria." For the moment her coolness and her wise impassivity had gone. Her behaviour was lacerating.

This was the very worst moment we had come to yet.[31]

And it seemed that Ursula Dearmer and Mrs. Lambert had gone to bed, regardless of the retreat from Ghent.

Somewhere in the small hours of the morning the Commandant came back from Melle.[32]

* * * * *

It is nearly two o'clock. Downstairs, in the great silent hall two British wounded are waiting for some ambulance to take them to the Station. They are sitting bolt upright on chairs near the doorway, their heads nodding with drowsiness. One or two Belgian Red Cross men wait beside them. Opposite them, on three other chairs, the three doctors, Dr. Haynes, Dr. Bird and Dr. — sit waiting for our own ambulance to take them. They have been up all night and are utterly exhausted. They sit, fast asleep, with their heads bowed on their breasts.

Outside, the darkness has mist and a raw cold sting in it.

A wretched ambulance wagon drawn by two horses is driven up to the door. It had a hood once, but the hood has disappeared and only the naked hoops remain. The British wounded from two [?] other hospitals are packed in it in two rows. They sit bolt upright under the hoops, exposed to mist and to the raw cold sting of the night; some of them wear their blankets like shawls over their shoulders as they were taken from their beds. The shawls and the head bandages give these British a strange, foreign look, infinitely helpless, infinitely pitiful.

Nobody seems to be out there but Mrs. Torrence and one or two Belgian Red Cross men. She and I help to get our two men taken gently out of the hall and stowed away in the ambulance wagon. There are not enough blankets. We try to find some.

At the last minute two bearers come forward, carrying a third. He is tall and thin; he is wrapped in a coat flung loosely over his sleeping–jacket; he wears a turban of bandages; his long bare feet stick out as he is carried along. It is Cameron, my poor Highlander, who was shot through the brain.

They lift him, very gently, into the wagon.

Then, very gently, they lift him out again.

This attempt to save him is desperate. He is dying.

[31] It was so bad that it made me forget to pack the Commandant's Burberry and his Gillette razors and his pipe.
[32] The Commandant had had an adventure. The Belgian guide mistook the road and brought the car straight into the German lines instead of the British lines where it had been sent. If the Germans hadn't been preoccupied with firing at that moment, the Commandant and Ascot and the Belgian would all have been taken prisoner.

They carry him up the steps and stand him there with his naked feet on the stone. It is anguish to see those thin white feet on the stone; I take off my coat and put it under them.

It is all I can do for him.

Presently they carry him back into the Hospital.

They can't find any blankets. I run over to the Hôtel Cecil for my thick, warm travelling–rug to wrap round the knees of the wounded, shivering in the wagon.

It is all I can do for them.

And presently the wagon is turned round, slowly, almost solemnly, and driven off into the darkness and the cold mist, with its load of weird and piteous figures, wrapped in blankets like shawls. Their bandages show blurred white spots in the mist, and they are gone.

It is horrible.

* * * * *

I am reminded that I have not packed yet, nor dressed for the journey. I go over and pack and dress. I leave behind what I don't need and it takes seven minutes. There is something sad and terrible about the little hotel, and its proprietors and their daughter, who has waited on me. They have so much the air of waiting, of being on the eve. They hang about doing nothing. They sit mournfully in a corner of the half–darkened restaurant. As I come and go they smile at me with the patient Belgian smile that says, "*C'est triste, n'est–ce pas?*" and no more.

The landlord puts on his soft brown felt hat and carries my luggage over to the "Flandria." He stays there, hanging about the porch, fascinated by these preparations for departure. There is the same terrible half–darkness here, the same expectant stillness. Now and then the servants of the hospital look at each other and there are whisperings, mutterings. They sound sinister somehow and inimical. Or perhaps I imagine this because I do not take kindly to retreating. Anyhow I am only aware of them afterwards. For now it is time to go and fetch Miss Ashley–Smith and her three wounded men from the Convent.

Tom has come up with his first ambulance car. He is waiting for orders in the porch. His enormous motor goggles are pushed up over the peak of his cap. They make it look like some formidable helmet. They give an air of mastership to Tom's face. At this last hour it wears its expression of righteous protest, of volcanic patience, of exasperated discipline.

The Commandant is nowhere to be seen. And every minute of his delay increases Tom's sense of tortured integrity.

I tell Tom that he is to drive me at once to the Couvent de Saint Pierre. He wants to know what for.

I tell him it is to fetch Miss Ashley–Smith and three British wounded.

He shrugs his shoulders. He knows nothing about the Couvent de Saint Pierre and Miss Ashley–Smith and three British wounded, and his shrug implies that he cares less.

And he says he has no orders to go and fetch them.

I perceive that in this supreme moment I am up against Tom's superstition. He won't move anywhere without orders. It is his one means of putting himself in the right and everybody else in the wrong.

And the worst of it is he *is* right.

I am also up against Tom's sex prejudices. I remember that he is said to have sworn with an oath that he wasn't going to take orders from any woman.

And the Commandant is nowhere to be seen.

Tom sticks to the ledge of the porch and stares at me defiantly. The servants of the Hospital come out and look at us. They are so many reinforcements to Tom's position.

I tell him that the arrangement has been made with the Commandant's consent, and I repeat firmly that he is to get into his car this minute and drive to the Couvent de Saint Pierre.

He says he does not know where the Convent is. It may be anywhere.

I tell him where it is, and he says again he hasn't got orders.

I stand over him and with savage and violent determination I say: "You've got them *now*!"

And, actually, Tom obeys. He says, "*All* right, all right, all right," very fast, and humps his shoulders and slouches off to his car. He cranks it up with less vehemence than I have yet known him bring to the starting of any car.

We get in. Then, and not till then, I am placable. I say: "You see, Tom, it wouldn't do to leave that lady and three British wounded behind, would it?"

What he says about orders then is purely by way of apology.

Regardless of my instructions, he does what I did and dashes up the wrong boulevard as if the Germans were even now marching into the *Place* behind him. But he works round somehow and we arrive.

They are all there, ready and waiting. And the Mother Superior and two of her nuns are in the corridor. They bring out glasses of hot milk for everybody. They are so gentle and so kind that I recall with agony my impatience when I rang at their gate. Even familiar French words desert me in this crisis, and I implore Miss Ashley–Smith to convey my regrets for my rudeness. Their only answer is to smile and press hot milk on me. I am glad of it, for I have been so absorbed in the drama of preparation that I have entirely forgotten to eat anything since lunch.

The wounded are brought along the passage. We help them into the ambulance. Two, Williams and —, are only slightly wounded; they can sit up all the way. But the third, Fisher, is wounded in the head. Sometimes he is delirious and must be looked after. A fourth man is dying and must be left behind.

Then we say good–bye to the nuns.

The other ambulance cars are drawn up in the *Place* before the "Flandria," waiting. For the first time I hate the sight of them. This feeling is inexplicable but profound.

We arrange for the final disposal of the wounded in one of the new Daimlers, where they can all lie down. Mrs. Torrence comes out and helps us. The Commandant is not there yet. Dr. Haynes and Dr. Bird pack Dr. — away well inside the car. They are very quiet and very firm and refuse to travel otherwise than together. Mrs. Torrence goes with the wounded.

I go into the Hospital and upstairs to our quarters to see if anything has been left behind. If I can find Marie we must take her. There is room, after all.

But Marie is nowhere to be seen.

Nobody is to be seen but the Belgian night nurses on duty, watching, one on each landing at the entrance to her corridor. They smile at me gravely and sadly as they say good–bye.

I have left many places, many houses, many people behind me, knowing that I shall never see them again. But of all leave–takings this seems to me the worst. For those others I have been something, done something that absolves me. But for these and for this place I have not done anything, and now there is not anything to be done.

I go slowly downstairs. Each flight is a more abominable descent. At each flight I stand still and pull myself together to face the next nurse on the next landing. At the second story I go past without looking. I know every stain on the floor of the corridor there as you turn to the right. The number of the door and the names on the card beside it have made a pattern on my brain.

* * * * *

It is quarter to three.

They are all ready now. The Commandant is there giving the final orders and stowing away the nine wounded he has brought from Melle. The hall of the Hospital is utterly deserted. So is the *Place* outside it. And in the stillness and desolation our going has an air of intolerable secrecy, of furtive avoidance of fate. This Field Ambulance of ours abhors retreat.

It is dark with the black darkness before dawn.

And the Belgian Red Cross guides have all gone. There is nobody to show us the roads.

At the last minute we find a Belgian soldier who will take us as far as Ecloo.

The Commandant has arranged to stay at Ecloo for a few hours. Some friends there have offered him their house. The wounded are to be put up at the Convent. Ecloo is about half–way between Ghent and Bruges.

We start. Tom's car goes first with the Belgian soldier in front. Ursula Dearmer, Mrs. Lambert, Miss Ashley–Smith and Mr. Riley and I are inside. The Commandant sits, silent, wrapped in meditation, on the step.

We are not going so very fast, not faster than the three cars behind us, and the slowest of the three (the Fiat with the hard tyres, carrying the baggage) sets the pace. We must keep within their sight or they may lose their way. But though we are not really going fast, the speed seems intolerable, especially the speed that swings us out of sight of the "Flandria." You think that is the worst. But it isn't. The speed with its steady acceleration grows more intolerable with every mile. Your sense of safety grows intolerable.

You never knew that safety could hurt like this.

Somewhere on this road the Belgian Army has gone before us. We have got to go with it. We have had our orders.

That thought consoles you, but not for long. You may call it following the Belgian Army. But the Belgian Army is retreating, and you are retreating with it. There is nothing else you can do; but that does not make it any better. And this speed of the motor over the flat roads, this speed that cuts the air, driving its furrow so fast that the wind rushes by you like strong water, this speed that so inspired and exalted you when it brought you into Flanders, when it took you to Antwerp and Baerlaere and Lokeren and Melle, this vehement and frightful and relentless speed is the thing that beats you down and tortures you. For several hours, ever since you had your orders to pack up and go, you have been working with no other purpose than this going; you have contemplated it many times with equanimity, with indifference; you knew all along that it was not possible to stay in Ghent for ever; and when you were helping to get the wounded into the ambulances you thought it would be the easiest thing in the world

to get in yourself and go with them; when you had time to think about it you were even aware of looking forward with pleasure to the thrill of a clean run before the Germans. You never thought, and nobody could possibly have told you, that it would be like this.

I never thought, and nobody could possibly have told me, that I was going to behave as I did then.

The thing began with the first turn of the road that hid the "Flandria." Up till that moment, whatever I may have felt about the people we had to leave behind us, as long as none of our field–women were left behind, I had not the smallest objection to being saved myself. And if it had occurred to me to stay behind for the sake of one man who couldn't be moved and who had the best surgeon in the Hospital and the pick of the nursing–staff to look after him, I think I should have disposed of the idea as sheer sentimentalism. When I was with him to–night I could think of nothing but the wounded in the Couvent de Saint Pierre. And afterwards there had been so much to do.

And now that there was nothing more to do, I couldn't think of anything but that one man.

The night before came back to me in a vision, or rather an obsession, infinitely more present, more visible and palpable than this night that we were living in. The light with the red shade hung just over my head on my right hand; the blond walls were round me; they shut me in alone with the wounded man who lay stretched before me on the bed. And the moments were measured by the rhythm of his breathing, and by the closing and opening of his eyes.

I thought, he will open his eyes to–night and look for me and I shall not be there. He will know that he has been left to the Belgians, who cannot understand him, whom he cannot understand. And he will think that I have betrayed him.

I felt as if I *had* betrayed him.

I am sitting between Mr. Riley and Miss Ashley–Smith. Mr. Riley is ill; he has got blood–poisoning through a cut in his hand. Every now and then I remember him, and draw the rug over his knees as it slips. Miss Ashley–Smith, tired with her night watching, has gone to sleep with her head on my shoulder, where it must be horribly jolted and shaken by my cough, which of course chooses this moment to break out again. I try to get into a position that will rest her better; and between her and Mr. Riley I forget for a second.

Then the obsession begins again, and I am shut in between the blond walls with the wounded man.

I feel his hand and arm lying heavily on my shoulder in the attempt to support me as I kneel by his bed with my arms stretched out together under the hollow of his back, as we wait for the pillow that never comes.

It is quite certain that I have betrayed him.

It seems to me then that nothing that could happen to me in Ghent could be more infernal than leaving it. And I think that when the ambulance stops to put down the Belgian soldier I will get out and walk back with him to Ghent.

Every half–mile I think that the ambulance will stop to put down the Belgian soldier.

But the ambulance does not stop. It goes on and on, and we have got to Ecloo before we seem to have put three miles between us and Ghent.

Still, though I'm dead tired when we get there, I can walk three miles easily. I do not feel at all insane with my obsession. On the contrary, these moments are moments of exceptional

lucidity.[33] While the Commandant goes to look for the Convent I get out and look for the Belgian soldier. Other Belgian soldiers have joined him in the village street.

I tell him I want to go back to Ghent. I ask him how far it is to walk, and if he will take me. And he says it is twenty kilometres. The other soldiers say, too, it is twenty kilometres. I had thought it couldn't possibly be more than four or five at the outside. And I am just sane enough to know that I can't walk as far as that if I'm to be any good when I get there.

We wait in the village while they find the Convent and take the wounded men there; we wait while the Commandant goes off in the dark to find his friend's house.

The house stands in a garden somewhere beyond the railway station, up a rough village street and a stretch of country road. It is about four in the morning when we get there. A thin ooze of light is beginning to leak through the mist. The mist holds it as a dark cloth holds a fluid that bleaches it.

There is something queer about this light. There is something queer, something almost inimical, about the garden, as if it tried to protect itself by enchantment from the fifteen who are invading it. The mist stands straight up from the earth like a high wall drawn close about the house; it blocks with dense grey stuff every inch of space between the bushes and trees; they are thrust forward rank upon rank, closing in upon the house; they loom enormous and near. A few paces further back they appear as without substance in the dense grey stuff that invests them; their tops are tangled and lost in a web of grey. In this strange garden it is as if space itself had solidified in masses, and solid objects had become spaces between.

When your eyes get used to this curious inversion it is as if the mist was no longer a wall but a growth; the garden is the heart of a jungle bleached by enchantment and struck with stillness and cold; a tangle of grey; a muffled, huddled and stifled bower, all grey, and webbed and laced with grey.

The door of the house opens and the effect of queerness, of inimical magic disappears.

Mr. E., our kind Dutch host, and Mrs. E., our kind English hostess, have got up out of their beds to receive us. This hospitality of theirs is not a little thing when you think that their house is to be invaded by Germans, perhaps to–day.[34]

They do not allow you to think of it. For all you are to see of the tragedy they and their house might be remaining at Ecloo in leisure and perfect hospitality and peace. Only, as they see us pouring in over their threshold a hovering twinkle in their kind eyes shows that they are not blind to the comic aspect of retreats.

They have only one spare bedroom, which they offer; but they have filled their drawing–room with blankets; piles and piles of white fleecy blankets on chairs and sofas and on the floor. And they have built up a roaring fire. It is as if they were succouring fifteen survivors of shipwreck or of earthquake, or the remnants of a forlorn hope. To be sure, we are flying from Ghent, but we have only flown twenty kilometres as yet.

However, most of the Corps have been up all night for several nights, and the mist outside is a clinging and a biting mist, and everybody is grateful.

I shall never forget the look of the E.s' drawing–room, smothered in blankets and littered with the members of the Corps, who lay about it in every pathetic posture of fatigue. A group

[33] Even now, five months after, I cannot tell whether it was or was not insanity.
[34] It is really dreadful to think of the nuisance we must have been to these dear people on the eve of their own flight.

of seven or eight snuggled down among the blankets on the floor in front of the hearth like a camp before a campfire. Janet McNeil, curled up on one window–seat, and Ursula Dearmer, rolled in a blanket on the other, had the heart–rending beauty of furry animals under torpor. The chauffeurs Tom and Bert made themselves entirely lovable by going to sleep bolt upright on dining–room chairs on the outer ring of the camp. The E.s' furniture came in where it could with fantastic and incongruous effect.

I don't know how I got through the next three hours, for my obsession came back on me again and again, and as soon as I shut my eyes I saw the face and eyes of the wounded man. I remember sitting part of the time beside Miss Ashley–Smith, wide–awake, in a corner of the room behind Bert's chair. I remember wandering about the E.s' house. I must have got out of it, for I also remember finding myself in their garden, at sunrise.

And I remember the garden, though I was not perfectly aware of it at the time. It had a divine beauty, a serenity that refused to enter into, to ally itself in any way with an experience tainted by the sadness of the retreat from Ghent.

But because of its supernatural detachment and tranquillity and its no less supernatural illumination I recalled it the more vividly afterwards.

It was full of tall bushes and little slender trees standing in a delicate light. The mist had cleared to the transparency of still water, so still that under it the bushes and the trees stood in a cold, quiet radiance without a shimmer. The light itself was intensely still. What you saw was not the approach of light, but its mysterious arrest. It was held suspended in crystalline vapour, in thin shafts of violet and gold, clear as panes; it was caught and lifted upwards by the high bushes and the slender trees; it was veiled in the silver–green masses of their tops. Every green leaf and every blade of grass was a vessel charged. It was not so much that the light revealed these things as that these things revealed the light. There was no kindling touch, no tremor of dawn in that garden. It was as if it had removed the walls and put off the lacing webs and the thick cloths of grey stuff by some mystic impulse of its own, as if it maintained itself in stillness by an inner flame. Only the very finest tissues yet clung to it, to show that it was the same garden that disclosed itself in this clarity and beauty.

The next thing I remember is the Chaplain coming to me and our going together into the E.s' dining–room, and Miss Ashley–Smith's joining us there. My malady was contagious and she had caught it, but with no damage to her self–control.

She says very simply and quietly that she is going back to Ghent. And the infection spreads to the Chaplain. He says that neither of us is going back to Ghent, but that he is going. The poor boy tries to arrange with us how he may best do it, in secrecy, without poisoning the Commandant[35] and the whole Ambulance with the spirit of return. With difficulty we convince him that it would be useless for any man to go. He would be taken prisoner the minute he showed his nose in the "Flandria" and set to dig trenches till the end of the War.

Then he says, if only he had his cassock with him. They would respect *that* (which is open to doubt).

We are there a long time discussing which of us is going back to Ghent. Miss Ashley–Smith is fertile and ingenious in argument. She is a nurse, and I and the Chaplain are not. She has friends in Ghent who have not been warned, whom she must go back to. In any case, she says, it was a toss–up whether she went or stayed.

[35] The Commandant had his own scheme for going back to Ghent, which fortunately he did not carry out.

And while we are still arguing, we go out on the road that leads to the village, to find the ambulances and see if any of the chauffeurs will take us back to Ghent. I am not very hopeful about the means of transport. I do not think that Tom or any of the chauffeurs will move, this time, without orders from the Commandant. I do not think that the Commandant will let any of us go except himself.

And Miss Ashley–Smith says if only she had a horse.

If she had a horse she would be in Ghent in no time. Perhaps, if none of the chauffeurs will take her back, she can find a horse in the village.

She keeps on saying very quietly and simply that she is going, and explaining the reasons why she should go rather than anybody else. And I bring forward every reason I can think of why she should do nothing of the sort.

I abhor the possibility of her going back instead of me; but I am not yet afraid of it. I do not yet think seriously that she will do it. I do not see how she is going to, if the chauffeurs refuse to take her. (I do not see how, in this case, I am to go myself.) And I do not imagine for one moment that she will find a horse. Still, I am vaguely uneasy. And the Chaplain doesn't make it any better by backing her up and declaring that as she will be more good than either of us when she gets there, her going is the best thing that in the circumstances can be done.

And in the end, with an extreme quietness and simplicity, she went.

We had not yet found the ambulance cars, and it seemed pretty certain that Miss Ashley–Smith would not get her horse any more than the Chaplain could get his cassock.

And then, just when we thought the difficulties of transport were insuperable, we came straight on the railway lines and the station, where a train had pulled up on its way to Ghent. Miss Ashley–Smith got on to the train. I got on too, to go with her, and the Chaplain, who is abominably strong, put his arms round my waist and pulled me off.

I have never ceased to wish that I had hung on to that train.

On our way back to the E.s' house we met the Commandant and told him what had happened. I said I thought it was the worst thing that had happened yet. It wasn't the smallest consolation when he said it was the most sensible solution.

And when Mrs. ⸻ for fifteen consecutive seconds took the view that I had decoyed Miss Ashley–Smith out on to that accursed road in order to send her to Ghent, and deliberately persuaded her to go back to the "Flandria" instead of me, for fifteen consecutive seconds I believed that this diabolical thing was what I had actually done.

Mrs. ⸻'s indignation never blazes away for more than fifteen seconds; but while the conflagration lasts it is terrific. And on circumstantial evidence the case was black against me. When last seen, Miss Ashley–Smith was entirely willing to be saved. She goes out for a walk with me along a quiet country road, and the next thing you hear is that she has gone back to Ghent. And since, actually and really, it was my obsession that had passed into her, I felt that if I had taken Miss Ashley–Smith down that road and murdered her in a dyke my responsibility wouldn't have been a bit worse, if as bad.

And it seemed to me that all the people scattered among the blankets in that strange room, those that still lay snuggling down amiably in the warmth, and those that had started to their feet in dismay, and those that sat on chairs upright and apart, were hostile with a just and righteous hostility, that they had an intimate knowledge of my crime, and had risen up in abhorrence of the thing I was.

And somewhere, as if they were far off in some blessed place on the other side of this nightmare, I was aware of the merciful and pitiful faces of Mrs. Lambert and Janet McNeil.

Then, close beside me, there was a sudden heaving of the Chaplain's broad shoulders as he faced the room.

And I heard him saying, in the same voice in which he had declared that he was going to hold Matins, that it wasn't my fault at all—that it was *he* who had persuaded Miss Ashley–Smith to go back to Ghent.[36]

The Chaplain has a moral nerve that never fails him.

Then Mrs. Torrence says that she is going back to protect Miss Ashley–Smith, and Ursula Dearmer says that she is going back to protect Mrs. Torrence, and somebody down in the blankets remarks that the thing was settled last night, and that all this going back is simply rotten.

I can only repeat that it is all my fault, and that therefore, if Mrs. Torrence goes back, nobody is going back with her but me.

And there can be no doubt that three motor ambulances, with possibly the entire Corps inside them, certainly with the five women and the Chaplain and the Commandant, would presently have been seen tearing along the road to Ghent, one in violent pursuit of the other, if we had not telephoned and received news of Miss Ashley–Smith's safe arrival at the "Flandria," and orders that no more women were to return to Ghent.

Among all the variously assorted anguish of that halt at Ecloo the figures and the behaviour of Mrs. E. and her husband and their children are beautiful to remember—their courtesy, their serenity, their gentle and absolving wonder that anybody should see anything in the least frightful or distressing, or even disconcerting and unusual, in the situation; the little girl who sat beside me, showing me her picture–book of animals, accepting gravely and earnestly all that you had to tell her about the ways of squirrels, of kangaroos and opossums, while we waited for the ambulance cars to take us to Bruges; the boy who ran after us as we went, and stood looking after us and waving to us in the lane; the aspect of that Flemish house and garden as we left them—there is no word that embraces all these things but beauty.

We stopped in the village to take up our wounded from the Convent. The nuns brought us through a long passage and across a little court to the refectory, which had been turned into a ward. Bowls steaming with the morning meal for the patients stood on narrow tables between the two rows of beds. Each bed was hung round and littered with haversacks, boots, rifles, bandoliers and uniforms bloody and begrimed. Except for the figures of the nuns and the aspect of its white–washed walls and its atmosphere of incorruptible peace, the place might have been a barracks or the dormitory in a night lodging, rather than a convent ward.

When we had found and dressed our men, we led them out as we had come. As we went we saw, framed through some open doorway, sunlight and vivid green, and the high walls and clipped alleys of the Convent garden.

Of all our sad contacts and separations, these leave–takings at the convents were the saddest. And it was not only that this place had the same poignant and unbearable beauty as the place we had just left, but its beauty was unique. You felt that if the friends you had just left were turned out of their house and garden to–morrow, they might still return some day. But here

[36] This girl's courage and self–devotion were enough to establish our innocence—they needed no persuasion. But I still hold myself responsible for her going, since it was my failure to control my obsession that first of all put the idea in her head.

you saw a carefully guarded and fragile loveliness on the very eve of its dissolution. The place was fairly saturated with holiness, and the beauty of holiness was in the faces and in every gesture of the nuns. And you felt that they and their faces and their gestures were impermanent, that this highly specialized form of holiness had continued with difficulty until now, that it hung by a single thread to a world that had departed very far from it.

Yet, for the moment while you looked at it, it maintained itself in perfection.

We shall never know all that the War has annihilated. But for that moment of time while it lasted, the Convent at Ecloo annihilated the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries, every century between now and the fifteenth. What you saw was a piece of life cut straight out of the Middle Ages. What you felt was the guarded and hidden beauty of the Middle Ages, the beauty of obedience, simplicity and chastity, of souls set apart and dedicated, the whole insoluble secret charm of the cloistered life. The very horror of the invasion that threatened it at this hour of the twentieth century was a horror of the Middle Ages.

But these devoted women did not seem aware of it. The little high–bred English nun who conducted us talked politely and placidly of England and of English things as of things remembered with a certain mortal affection but left behind without regret. It was as if she contemplated the eternal continuance of the Convent at Ecloo with no break in its divine tranquillity. One sister went so far as to express the hope that their Convent would be spared. It was as if she were uttering some merely perfunctory piety. The rest, without ceasing from their ministrations, looked up at us and smiled.

* * * * *

On the way up to Bruges we passed whole regiments of the Belgian Army in retreat. They trooped along in straggling disorder, their rifles at trail; behind them the standard–bearers trudged, carrying the standard furled and covered with black. The speed of our cars as we overtook them was more insufferable than ever.

Bruges

We thought that the Belgian Army would be quartered in Bruges, and that we should find a hospital there and serve the Army from that base.

We took our wounded to the Convent, and set out to find quarters for ourselves in the town. We had orders to meet at the Convent again at a certain hour.

Most of the Corps were being put up at the Convent. The rest of us had to look for rooms.

In the search I got separated from the Corps, and wandered about the streets of Bruges with much interest and a sense of great intimacy and leisure. By the time I had found a *pension* in a narrow street behind the market–place, I felt it to be quite certain that we should stay in Bruges at least as long as we had stayed in Ghent, and what moments I could spare from the obsession of Ghent I spent in contemplating the Belfry. Very soon it was time to go back to the Convent. The way to the Convent was through many tortuous streets, but I was going in the right direction, accompanied by a kind Flamand and her husband, when at the turn by the canal bridge I was nearly run over by one of our own ambulance cars. It was Bert's car, and he was driving with fury and perturbation away from the Convent and towards the town. Janet McNeil was with him. They stopped to tell me that we had orders to clear out of Bruges. The Germans had taken Ghent and were coming on to Bruges. We had orders to go on to Ostend.

We found the rest of the cars drawn up in a street near the Convent. We had not been two hours in Bruges, and we left it, if anything, quicker than we had come in. The flat land fairly dropped away before our speed. I sat on the back step of the leading car, and I shall never forget the look of those ambulances, three in a line, as they came into sight scooting round the turns on the road to Ostend.

Besides the wounded we had brought from Ghent, we took with us three footsore Tommies whom we had picked up in Bruges. They had had a long march. The stoutest, biggest and most robust of these three fainted just as we drew up in the courtyard of the *Kursaal* at Ostend.

Ostend

The *Kursaal* had been taken by some English and American women and turned into a Hospital. It was filled already to overflowing, but they found room for our wounded for the night. Ostend was to be evacuated in the morning. In fact, we were considered to be running things rather fine by staying here instead of going on straight to Dunkirk. It was supposed that if the Germans were not yet in Bruges they might be there any minute.

But we had had so many premature orders to clear out, and the Germans had always been hours behind time, and we judged it a safe risk. Besides, there were forty–seven Belgian wounded in Bruges, and three of our ambulance cars were going back to fetch them.

There was some agitation as to who would and who wouldn't be allowed to go back to Bruges. The Commandant was at first inclined to reject his Secretary as unfit. But if you take him the right way he is fairly tractable, and I managed to convince him that nothing but going back to Bruges could make up for my failure to go back to Ghent. He earned my everlasting gratitude by giving me leave. As for Mrs. Torrence, she had no difficulty. She was obviously competent.

Then, just as I was congratulating myself that the shame of Ecloo was to be wiped out (to say nothing of that ignominious overthrow at Melle), there occurred a *contretemps* that made our ambulance conspicuous among the many ambulances in the courtyard of the Hospital.

We had reckoned without the mistimed chivalry of our chauffeurs.

They had all, even Tom, been quite pathetically kind and gentle during and ever since the flight from Ghent. (I remember poor Newlands coming up with his bottle of formamint just as we were preparing to leave Ecloo.) It never occurred to us that there was anything ominous in this mood.

Mrs. Torrence and I were just going to get into (I think) Newlands' car, when we were aware of Newlands standing fixed on the steps of the Hospital, looking like Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, in khaki, and flatly refusing to drive his car into Bruges, not only if we were in his car, but if one woman went with the expedition in any other car.

He stood there, very upright, on the steps of the Hospital, and rather pale, while the Commandant and Mrs. Torrence surged up to him in fury. The Commandant told him he would be sacked for insubordination, and Mrs. Torrence, in a wild flight of fancy, threatened to expose him "in the papers."

But Newlands stood his ground. He was even more like Lord Kitchener than Tom. He simply could not get over the idea that women were to be protected. And to take the women into Bruges when the Germans were, for all we knew, *in* Bruges, was an impossibility to Newlands, as it would have been to Lord Kitchener. So he went on refusing to take his car into Bruges if one woman went with the expedition. In retort to a charge of cold feet, he intimated that he was ready to drive into any hell you pleased, provided he hadn't got to take any women with him. He didn't care if he *was* sacked. He didn't care if Mrs. Torrence *did* report him in the papers. He wouldn't drive his car into Bruges if one woman—

Here, in his utter disregard of all discipline, the likeness between Newlands and Lord Kitchener ends. Enough that he drove his car into Bruges on his own terms, and Mrs. Torrence and I were left behind.

The expedition to Bruges returned safely with the forty–seven Belgian wounded.

We found rooms in a large hotel on the Digue, overlooking the sea. Before evening I went round to the Hospital to see Miss Ashley–Smith's three wounded men. The *Kursaal* is built in terraces and galleries going all round the front and side of it. I took the wrong turning round one of them and found myself in the doorway of an immense ward. From somewhere inside there came loud and lacerating screams, high–pitched but appallingly monotonous and without intervals. I thought it was a man in delirium; I even thought it might be poor Fisher, of whose attacks we had been warned. I went in.

I had barely got a yard inside the ward before a kind little rosy–faced English nurse ran up to me. I told her what I wanted.

She said, "You'd better go back. You won't be able to stand it."

Even then I didn't take it in, and said I supposed the poor man was delirious.

She cried out, "No! No! He is having his leg taken off."

They had run short of anæsthetics.

I don't know what I must have looked like, but the little rosy–faced nurse grabbed me and said, "Come away. You'll faint if you see it."

And I went away. Somebody took me into the right ward, where I found Fisher and Williams and the other man. Fisher was none the worse for his journey, and Williams and the other man were very cheerful. Another English nurse, who must have had the tact of a heavenly angel, brought up a bowl of chicken broth and said I might feed Fisher if I liked. So I sat a little while there, feeding Fisher, and regretting for the hundredth time that I had not had the foresight to be trained as a nurse when I was young. Unfortunately, though I foresaw this war ten years ago, I had not foreseen it when I was young. I told the men I would come and see them early in the morning, and bring them some money, as I had promised Miss Ashley–Smith. I never saw them again.

Nothing happened quite as I had planned it.

To begin with, we had discovered as we lunched at Bruges that the funds remaining in the leather purse–belt were hardly enough to keep the Ambulance going for another week. And our hotel expenses at Ostend were reducing its term to a problematic three days. So it was more or less settled amongst us that somebody would have to go over to England the next day and return with funds, and that the supernumerary Secretary was, on the whole, the fittest person for the job.

I slept peaceably on this prospect of a usefulness that seemed to justify my existence at a moment when it most needed vindication.

Tuesday, 13th

I got up at six. Last thing at night I had said to myself that I must wake early and go round to the Hospital with the money.

With my first sleep the obsession of Ghent had slackened its hold. And though it came back again after I had got up, dressed and had realized my surroundings, its returns were at longer and longer intervals.

The first thing I did was to go round to the *Kursaal*. The Hospital was being evacuated, the wounded were lying about everywhere on the terraces and galleries, waiting for the ambulances. Williams and Fisher and the other man were nowhere to be seen. I was told that their ward had been cleared out first, and that the three were now safe on their way to England.

I went away very grieved that they had not got their money.

At the Hotel I find the Commandant very cheerful. He has made Miss ― his Secretary and Reporter till my return.[37]

He goes down to the quay to make arrangements for my transport and returns after some considerable time. There have been difficulties about this detail. And the Commandant has an abhorrence of details, even of easy ones.

He comes back. He looks abstracted. I inquire, a little too anxiously, perhaps, about my transport. It is all right, all perfectly right. He has arranged with Dr. Beavis of the British Field Hospital to take me on his ship.

He looks a little spent with his exertions, and as he has again become abstracted I forbear to press for more information at the moment.

We breakfasted. Presently I ask him the name of Dr. Beavis's ship.

Oh, the *name* of the ship is the *Dresden*.

Time passes. And presently, just as he is going, I suggest that it would be as well for me to know what time the *Dresden* sails.

This detail either he never knew or has forgotten. And there is something about it, about the nature of stated times, as about all things conventional and mechanical and precise, that peculiarly exasperates him.

He waves both hands in a fury of nescience and cries, "Ask me another!"

By a sort of mutual consent we assume that the *Dresden* will sail with Dr. Beavis at ten o'clock. After all, it is a very likely hour.

More time passes. Finally we go into the street that runs along the Digue. And there we find Dr. Beavis sitting in a motor–car. We approach him. I thank him for his kindness in giving me transport. I say I'm sure his ship will be crowded with his own people, but that I don't in the least mind standing in the stoke–hole, if *he* doesn't mind taking me over.

He looks at me with a dreamy benevolence mixed with amazement. He would take me over with pleasure if he knew how he was to get away himself.

[37] I saw nothing sinister about this arrangement at the time. It seemed incredible to me that I should not return.

“But,” I say to the Commandant, “I thought you had arranged with Dr. Beavis to take me on the *Dresden*.”

The Commandant says nothing. And Dr. Beavis smiles again. A smile of melancholy knowledge.

“The *Dresden*,” he says, “sailed two hours ago.”

So it is decided that I am to proceed with the Ambulance to Dunkirk, thence by train to Boulogne, thence to Folkestone. It sounds so simple that I wonder why we didn’t think of it before.

But it was not by any means so simple as it sounded.

First of all we had to collect ourselves. Then we had to collect Dr. Hanson’s luggage. Dr. Hanson was one of Mrs. St. Clair Stobart’s women surgeons, and she had left her luggage for Miss — to carry from Ostend to England. There was a yellow tin box and a suit–case. Dr. Hanson’s best clothes and her cases of surgical instruments were in the suit–case and all the things she didn’t particularly care about in the tin box. Or else the best clothes and the surgical instruments were in the tin box, and the things she didn’t particularly care about in the suit–case. As we were certainly going to take both boxes, it didn’t seem to matter much which way round it was.

Then there was Mr. Foster’s green canvas kit–bag to be taken to Folkestone and sent to him at the Victoria Hospital there.

And there was a British Red Cross lady and her luggage—but we didn’t know anything about the lady and her luggage yet.

We found them at the *Kursaal* Hospital, where some of our ambulances were waiting.

By this time the courtyard, the steps and terraces of the Hospital were a scene of the most ghastly confusion. The wounded were still being carried out and still lay, wrapped in blankets, on the terraces; those who could sit or stand sat or stood. Ambulance cars jostled each other in the courtyard. Red Cross nurses dressed for departure were grouped despairingly about their luggage. Other nurses, who were not dressed for departure, who still remained superintending the removal of their wounded, paid no attention to these groups and their movements and their cries. The Hospital had cast off all care for any but its wounded.

Women seized hold of other women for guidance and instruction, and received none. Nobody was rudely shaken off—they were all, in fact, very kind to each other—but nobody had time or ability to attend to anybody else.

Somebody seized hold of the Commandant and sent us both off to look for the kitchen and for a sack of loaves which we would find in it. We were to bring the sack of loaves out as quickly as we could. We went off and found the kitchen, we found several kitchens; but we couldn’t find the sack of loaves, and had to go back without it. When we got back the lady who had commandeered the sack of loaves was no more to be seen on the terrace.

While we waited on the steps somebody remarked that there was a German aeroplane in the sky and that it was going to drop a bomb. There was. It was sailing high over the houses on the other side of the street. And it dropped its bomb right in front of us, above an enormous building not fifty yards away.

We looked, fascinated. We expected to see the building knocked to bits and flying in all directions. The bomb fell. And nothing happened. Nothing at all.

It was soon after the bomb that my attention was directed to the lady. She was a British Red Cross nurse, stranded with a hold–all and a green canvas trunk, and most particularly forlorn. She had lost her friends, she had lost her equanimity, she had lost everything except her luggage. How she attached herself to us I do not know. The Commandant says it was I who made myself responsible for her safety. We couldn't leave her to the Germans with her green canvas trunk and her hold–all.

So I heaved up one end of the canvas trunk, and the Commandant tore it from me and flung it to the chauffeurs, who got it and the hold–all into Bert's ambulance. I grasped the British Red Cross lady firmly by the arm, lest she should get adrift again, and hustled her along to the Hotel, where the yellow tin box and the suit–case and the kit–bag waited. Somebody got them into the ambulance somehow.

It was at this point that Ursula Dearmer appeared. (She had put up at some other hotel with Mrs. Lambert.)

My British Red Cross lady was explaining to me that she had by no means abandoned her post, but that she was doing the right thing in leaving Ostend, seeing that she meant to apply for another post on a hospital ship. She was sure, she said, she was doing the right thing. I said, as I towed her securely along by one hand through a gathering crowd of refugees (we were now making for the ambulance cars that were drawn up along the street by the Digue), I said I was equally sure she was doing the right thing and that nobody could possibly think otherwise.

And, as I say, Ursula Dearmer appeared.

The youngest but one was seated with Mr. Riley in the military scouting–car that was to be our convoy to Dunkirk. I do not know how it had happened, but in this hour, at any rate, she had taken over the entire control and command of the Ambulance; and this with a coolness and competence that suggested that it was no new thing. It suggested, also, that without her we should not have got away from Ostend before the Germans marched into it. In fact, it is hardly fair to say that she had taken everything over. Everything had lapsed into her hands at the supreme crisis by a sort of natural fitness.

We were all ready to go. The only one we yet waited for was the Commandant, who presently emerged from the Hotel. In his still dreamy and abstracted movements he was pursued by an excited waiter flourishing a bill. I forgot whose bill it was (it may have been mine), but anyhow it wasn't *his* bill.

We may have thought we were following the retreat of the Belgian Army when we went from Ghent to Bruges. We were, in fact, miles behind it, and the regiments we overtook were stragglers. The whole of the Belgian Army seemed to be poured out on to that road between Ostend and Dunkirk. Sometimes it was going before us, sometimes it was mysteriously coming towards us, sometimes it was stationary, but always it was there. It covered the roads; we had to cut our way through it. It was retreating slowly, as if in leisure, with a firm, unhasting dignity.

Every now and then, as we looked at the men, they smiled at us, with a curious still and tragic smile.

And it is by that smile that I shall always remember the look of the Belgian Army in the great retreat.

Our own retreat—the Ostend–Dunkirk bit of it—is memorable chiefly by Miss ―'s account of the siege of Antwerp and the splendid courage of Mrs. St. Clair Stobart and her women.

But that is her story, not mine, and it should be left to her to tell.

Dunkirk

At Dunkirk the question of the Secretary's transport again arose. It contended feebly with the larger problem of where and when and how the Corps was to lunch, things being further complicated by the Commandant's impending interview with Baron de Broqueville, the Belgian Minister of War. I began to feel like a large and useless parcel which the Commandant had brought with him in sheer absence of mind, and was now anxious to lose or otherwise get rid of. At the same time the Ambulance could not go on for more than three days without further funds, and, as the courier to be despatched to fetch them, I was, for the moment, the most important person in the Corps; and my transport was not a question to be lightly set aside.

I was about to solve the problem for myself by lugging my lady to the railway station, when Ursula Dearmer took us over too, in her stride, as inconsiderable items of the business before her. I have nothing but admiration for her handling of it.

We halted in the main street of Dunkirk while Mr. Riley and the chauffeurs unearthed from the baggage–car my hold–all and suit–case and the British Red Cross lady's hold–all and trunk and Mr. Foster's kit–bag and Dr. Hanson's suit–case with her best clothes and her surgical instruments and the tin—No, not the tin box, for the Commandant, now possessed by a violent demon of hurry, resisted our efforts to drag it from its lair.[38]

All these things were piled on Ursula Dearmer's military scouting–car. The British Red Cross lady (almost incredulous of her good luck) and I got inside it, and Ursula Dearmer and Mr. Riley drove us to the railway station.

By the mercy of Heaven a train was to leave for Boulogne either a little before or a little after one, and we had time to catch it.

There was a long line of refugee *bourgeois* drawn up before the station doors, and I noticed that every one of them carried in his hand a slip of paper.

Ursula Dearmer hailed a porter, who, she said, would look after us like a father. With a matchless celerity he and Mr. Riley tore down the pile of luggage. The porter put them on a barrow and disappeared with them very swiftly through the station doors.

At least I suppose it was through the doors. All we knew was that he disappeared.

Then Ursula Dearmer handed over to me three cables to be sent from Dunkirk. I said good–bye to her and Mr. Riley. They got back into the motor–car, and they, too, very swiftly disappeared.

Mr. Riley went away bearing with him the baffling mystery of his personality. After nearly three weeks' association with him I know that Mr. Riley's whole heart is in his job of carrying the wounded. Beyond that I know no more of him than on the day when he first turned up before our Committee.

But with Ursula Dearmer it is different. Before the Committee she appeared as a very young girl, docile, diffident, only half–awake, and of dubious efficiency. I remember my solemn pledges to her mother that Ursula Dearmer should not be allowed to go into danger, and how,

[38] Having saved the suit–case, I guarded it as a sacred thing. But Dr. Hanson's best clothes and her surgical instruments were in the tin box after all.

if danger insisted on coming to her, she should be violently packed up and sent home. I remember thinking what a nuisance Ursula Dearmer will be, and how, when things are just beginning to get interesting, I shall be told off to see her home.

And Ursula Dearmer, the youngest but one, has gone, not at all docilely and diffidently, into the greatest possible danger, and come out of it. And here she is, wide awake and in full command of the Ostend–Dunkirk expedition. And instead of my seeing her off and all the way home, she is very thoroughly and competently seeing *me* off.

At least this was her beautiful intention.

But getting out of France in war–time is not a simple matter.

When we tried to follow the flight of our luggage through the station door we were stopped by a sentry with a rifle. We produced our passports. They were not enough.

At the sight of us brought to halt there, all the refugees began to agitate their slips of paper. And on the slips we read the words "*Laissez–passer*."

My British Red Cross lady had no "*laissez–passer*." I had only my sixteenth part in the "*laissez–passer*" of the Corps, and that, hidden away in the Commandant's breast–pocket, was a part either of the luncheon–party or of the interview with the Belgian Minister of War.

We couldn't get military passes, for military passes take time; and the train was due in about fifteen minutes.

And the fatherly porter had vanished, taking with him the secret of our luggage.

It was a fatherly old French gentleman who advised us to go to the British *Consulat*. And it was a fatherly old French *cocher* who drove us there, or rather who drove us through interminable twisted streets and into blind alleys and out of them till we got there.

As for our luggage, we renounced it and Mr. Foster's and Dr. Hanson's luggage in the interests of our own safety.

At last we got to the British *Consulat*. Only I think the *cocher* took us to the Town Hall and the Hospital and the British Embassy and the Admiralty offices first.

At intervals during this transit the British Red Cross lady explained again that she was doing the right thing in leaving Ostend. It wasn't as if she was leaving her post, she was going on a hospital ship. She was sure she had done the right thing.

It was not for me to be unsympathetic to an obsession produced by a retreat, so I assured her again and again that if there ever was a right thing she had done it. My heart bled for this poor lady, abandoned by the organization that had brought her out.

In the courtyard of the *Consulat* we met a stalwart man in khaki, who smiled as a god might smile at our trouble, and asked us why on earth we hadn't got a passage on the naval transport *Victoria*, sailing at three o'clock. We said nothing would have pleased us better, only we had never heard of the *Victoria* and her sailing. And he took us to the Consul, and the Consul—who must have been buried alive in detail—gave us a letter to Captain King of the *Victoria*, and the *cocher* drove us to the dock.

Captain King was an angel. He was the head of a whole hierarchy of angels who called themselves ship's officers.

There is no difficulty about our transport. But we must be at the docks by half–past two.

We have an hour before us; so we drive back to the station to see if, after all, we can find that luggage. Not that we in the least expected to find it, for we had been told that it had gone on by the train to Boulogne.

Now the British Red Cross lady declared many times that but for me and my mastery of the French language she would never have got out of Dunkirk. And it was true that I looked on her more as a sacred charge than as a valuable ally in the struggle with French sentries, porters and officials. As for the *cocher*, I didn't consider him valuable at all, even as the driver of an ancient *fiacre*. And yet it was the lady and the *cocher* who found the luggage. It seems that the station hall is open between trains, and they had simply gone into the hall and seen it there, withdrawn bashfully into a corner. The *cocher's* face as he announces his discovery makes the War seem a monstrous illusion. It is incredible that anything so joyous should exist in a country under German invasion.

We drive again to the *Victoria* in her dock. The stewards run about and do things for us. They give us lunch. They give us tea. And the other officers come in and make large, simple jokes about bombs and mines and submarines. We have the ship all to ourselves except for a few British soldiers, recruits sent out to Antwerp too soon and sent back again for more training.

They looked, poor boys, far sadder than the Belgian Army.

And I walk the decks; I walk the decks till we get to Dover. My sacred charge appears and disappears. Every now and then I see her engaged in earnest conversation with the ship's officers; and I wonder whether she is telling them that she has not really left her post and that she is sure she has done right. I am no longer concerned about my own post, for I feel so sure that I am going back to it.

To–morrow I shall get the money from our Committee; and on Thursday I shall go back.

And yet—and yet—I must have had a premonition. We are approaching England. I can see the white cliffs.

And I hate the white cliffs. I hate them with a sudden and mysterious hatred.

More especially I hate the cliffs of Dover. For it is there that we must land. I should not have thought it possible to hate the white coast of my own country when she is at war.

And now I know that I hate it because it is not the coast of Flanders. Which would be absurd if I were really going back again.

Yes, I must have had a premonition.

Dover

We have landed now. I have said good–bye to Captain King and all the ship's officers and thanked them for their kindness. I have said good–bye to the British Red Cross lady, who is not going to London.

And I go to the station telegraph–office to send off five wires.

I am sending off the five wires when I hear feet returning through the station hall. The Red Cross lady is back again. She is saying this time that she is *really* sure she has done the right thing.

And again I assure her that she has.

Well—there are obsessions and obsessions. I do not know whether I have done the right thing or not in leaving Flanders (or, for that matter, in leaving Ghent). All that I know is that I love it and that I have left it. And that I want to go back.

Postscript

There have been changes in that Motor Field Ambulance Corps that set out for Flanders on the 25th of September, 1914.

Its Commandant has gone from it to join the Royal Army Medical Corps. A few of the original volunteers have dropped out and others have taken their places, and it is larger now than it was, and better organized.

But whoever went and whoever stayed, its four field–women have remained at the Front. Two of them are attached to the Third Division of the Belgian Army; all four have distinguished themselves by their devotion to that Army and by their valour, and they have all received the Order of Leopold II., the highest Belgian honour ever given to women.

The Commandant, being a man, has the Order of Leopold I. Mr. Ashmead–Bartlett and Mr. Philip Gibbs and Dr. Souttar have described his heroic action at the Battle of Dixmude on the 22nd of October, 1914, when he went into the cellars of the burning and toppling Town Hall to rescue the wounded. And from that day to this the whole Corps—old volunteers and new—has covered itself with glory.

On our two chauffeurs, Tom and Bert, the glory lies quite thick. "Tom" (if I may quote from my own story of the chauffeurs) "Tom was in the battle of Dixmude. At the order of his commandant he drove his car straight into the thick of it, over the ruins of a shattered house that blocked the way. He waited with his car while all the bombs that he had ever dreamed of crashed around him, and houses flamed, and tottered and fell. 'Pretty warm, ain't it?' was Tom's comment.

"Four days later he was waiting at Oudekappele with his car when he heard that the Hospital of Saint–Jean at Dixmude was being shelled and that the Belgian military man who had been sent with a motor–car to carry off the wounded had been turned back by the fragment of a shell that dropped in front of him. Tom thereupon drove into Dixmude to the Hospital of Saint–Jean and removed from it two wounded soldiers and two aged and paralysed civilians who had sheltered there, and brought them to Furnes. The military ambulance men then followed his lead, and the Hospital was emptied. That evening it was destroyed by a shell.

"And Bert—it was Bert who drove his ambulance into Kams–Kappele to the barricade by the railway. It was Bert who searched in a shell–hole to pick out three wounded from among thirteen dead; who with the help of a Belgian priest, carried the three several yards to his car, under fire, and who brought them in safety to Furnes."

And the others, the brave "Chaplain," and "Mr. Riley," and "Mr. Lambert," have also proved themselves.

But when I think of the Corps it is chiefly of the four field–women that I think—the two "women of Pervyse," and the other two who joined them at their dangerous *poste*.

Both at Furnes and Pervyse they worked all night, looking after their wounded; sometimes sleeping on straw in a room shared by the Belgian troops, when there was no other shelter for them in the bombarded town. One of them has driven a heavy ambulance car—in a pitch–black night, along a road raked by shell–fire, and broken here and there into great pits—to fetch a load of wounded, a performance that would have racked the nerves of any male chauffeur ever born. She has driven the same car, *alone*, with five German prisoners for her passengers. The four women served at Pervyse (the town nearest to the firing–line) in "Mrs.

Torrence's" dressing–station—a cellar only twenty yards behind the Belgian trenches. In that cellar, eight feet square and lighted and ventilated only by a slit in the wall, two lived for three weeks, sleeping on straw, eating what they could get, drinking water that had passed through a cemetery where nine hundred Germans are buried. They had to burn candles night and day. Here the wounded were brought as they fell in the trenches, and were tended until the ambulance came to take them to the base hospital at Furnes.

Day in, day out, and all night long, with barely an interval for a wash or a change of clothing, the women stayed on, the two always, and the four often, till the engineers built them a little hut for a dressing–station; they stayed till the Germans shelled them out of their little hut.

This is only a part of what they have done. The finest part will never be known, for it was done in solitary places and in the dark, when special correspondents are asleep in their hotels. There was no limelight on the road between Dixmude and Furnes, or among the blood and straw in the cellar at Pervyse.

And Miss Ashley–Smith (who is now Mrs. McDougall)—her escape from Ghent (when she had no more to do there) was as heroic as her return.

Since then she has gone back to the Front and done splendid service in her own Corps, the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry.

M. S.

July 15th, 1915.

THE END

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