

The Llandovery Castle

by
Stephanie Martin & Paul Ciufu

CAST

Nursing Sister Rena "Bird" McLean / Chorus Member

Nursing Sister Minnie Katherine "Kate" Gallaher / Chorus Member

Matron Margaret Marjorie "Pearl" Fraser / Chorus Member

Sergeant Arthur "Art" Knight

Major Thomas "Tom" Lyon

Oberleutnant Helmut Brummer-Patzig

Nursing Sister Mary Agnes "Nan" McKenzie / Chorus Member

Nursing Sister Christina Campbell / Chorus Member

Nursing Sister Alexina "Alex" Dussault / Chorus Member

SCENE ONE.

The deck of The Llandoverly Castle, a WW I hospital ship, at sea, sunset. A raised platform. A lifeboat marked #5 is off to the side of the platform; there are derricks and ropes that allow it to be lowered. There are oars and two axes in the boat. Note: alternatively this opera can be framed as a radio drama presented before a live audience, requiring minimal production values.

THE CHORUS enters, wearing WW I Canadian nursing (“Bluebirds”) uniforms but somehow otherworldly. Note these are the souls of nurses who have died serving in WW I. At other times in the opera these same performers will portray the living nurses Bird, Kate, Matron Fraser (Pearl), Nan, Alex, & Christina serving aboard the Llandoverly Castle. All of the nurses have two lieutenant pips on their shoulders except for Matron Fraser who has three bars indicating her higher rank.

Note: alternatively ALL can enter and sing.

THE CHORUS

Liverpool, Halifax... Halifax, Liverpool

Liverpool, Halifax... Halifax, Liverpool

June, nineteen-eighteen, a ship plies the Atlantic

No guns on her decks, no bombs at the ready

A vessel of mercy, red crosses blazing on her sides

A hospital of the waves, a haven for healing

She steams all alone, no escort, no convoy

THE CHORUS (CONT'D)

Her only armour: the thin laws of war

She is called The Llandoverly Castle

Heading west her cargo: six hundred men broken in battle

Going east her beds are all empty , empty

Her constant, her North Star?

Her healers, her nurses, her doctors

Liverpool, Halifax... Halifax, Liverpool

Liverpool, Halifax....

THE CHORUS exits. BIRD enters, vivacious but weary ,
she carries a great weight. She gazes at the setting sun.
KATE enters; she is angry , burnt out.

BIRD

Lovely sunset.

KATE

Nobody told the sky there's a war on.

BIRD

Halifax Harbour by morning. If we don't get torpedoed!

KATE

Bite your tongue!

BIRD (HALF JOKING)

A U-boat might take our red crosses for targets!

(NAN, CHRISTINA, and ALEX enter.)

Note ALEX has a Quebecois accent and
CHRISTINA has a Scottish brogue.)

ALEX

Sunset soiree?

BIRD

How are things below?

KATE

All of them wrecks. Blind, lungs ruined, so many amputation cases.

NAN

Yet they're so cheerful.

BIRD

They're alive, and almost home. This dreadful war is over -- for them.

KATE

God, I wish I could say the same!

BIRD (DIFFERS FERVENTLY)

I have to get back to the Front!

KATE

You're joking!?

(SERGEANT KNIGHT enters, brash,
British accent, wears the uniform of non-
commissioned officers in the Canadian
Army Medical Corps including red cross
patch on his sleeve, puttees.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT (NODS)

Sisters!

(THE NURSES nod, an informal salute.)

BIRD

Sergeant.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Long day?

BIRD

This is nothing. This is easy. The men are stable.

KATE

This one wants back into the action.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

How brave!

BIRD

Or, I've lost my mind -- likely somewhere in France.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

You're funny!

BIRD

You should have known me before; I was hilarious!

SERGEANT KNIGHT & KATE

You want back to the Front? Why on Earth return to Hell on Earth?

BIRD (PAINED)

I just have to!

(MAJOR LYON enters. He is a mild, kindly doctor who wears spectacles, the uniform of commissioned officers, including leather boots instead of puttees. ALL nod.)

MAJOR LYON

Good evening all. Grand plans for Halifax?

BIRD

A visit with my parents; they're making the trip from Prince Edward Island.

MAJOR LYON

Wonderful. You're "Bird", right?

BIRD

Yes, doctor. Major.

MAJOR LYON

Your family must be very proud. You're a fine nurse.

BIRD

I used to be.

MAJOR LYON

Nonsense!

BIRD

If you say so, sir. May I boldly ask a favour?

MAJOR LYON

Go right ahead.

BIRD

Put in a good word for me, with the Matron?

(MATRON FRASER enters, authoritative,
but caring. ALL nod.)

BIRD (CONT'D, SOFTLY)

Speak of the Devil!

NURSES

Goodnight all, good night.

MAJOR LYON

Goodnight.

(THE NURSES nod to Matron Fraser, exit.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Goodnight.

(SERGEANT KNIGHT exits.)

MATRON FRASER

I seem to have cleared the deck!

MAJOR LYON

You do put the fear of God in your nurses.

MATRON FRASER

They better not have been making time with that Sergeant!

MAJOR LYON

Now, Matron. May I ask: is "Bird" in your bad books?

MATRON FRASER

Why do you ask?

MAJOR LYON

No reason. I believe she is one of your best.

MATRON FRASER

Agreed.

MAJOR LYON

What's her story?

MATRON FRASER

Same as all my thirteen nurses aboard: she gave, and gave, and gave, and broke. They're wrecks, and it falls to me to decide: who can be salvaged? Sent back to the Front... to give, and give, and break again... or worse.

MAJOR LYON

That's a heavy load for you to haul.

MATRON FRASER

My brother Laurier was killed in action; he was only twenty-two. This war demands so much from us all.

SCENE TWO.

Conning tower of the German submarine U-86 which is on the surface. OBERLEUTNANT HELMUT PATZIG observes his prey.

PATZIG

Vollgas voraus!
I can't believe my luck
A ship, all alone, turtle slow,
Weighed down by her cargo
A Norwegian merchant ship,
A straggler from her convoy
One torpedo from me, and down, down she'll go
Brazenly I approach
Speeding on the surface
No need to skulk in the depths below
A wolf drawing near
A bleating, cornered sheep
My heart hammers hard
My mouth is dry as a bone
What's hidden in her hull?
For their fight against the Fatherland?
Very soon I'll know
If there's heavy steel in her hold
She'll sink quick as a wink
Fuel, munitions?
She'll light up the night,
Like fireworks on Silvester, or a funeral pyre
Ah!
I've got my range, the time has arrived
For me to speak, for enemies to die
Feuren Sie den Torpedo ab!

(Huge explosion, brilliant illumination.)

PATZIG (CONT'D)

Victory is mine, for the sixteenth time
 An Allied craft meets its end at my skilled hands
 I spare a thought for the dead, dying sailors
 But only for a moment
 Those weapons I intercepted
 Would have slain my countrymen
 Some lives I've taken, some I've given
 My superiors will be pleased
 As they've been in the past
 Already they've pinned the Iron Cross to my chest
 Soon they'll promote me
 A new rank will be mine
 My name will be spoken with respect
 From the Weichsel to the Rhine

(PATZIG is handed a piece of paper, reads.)

PATZIG (CONT'D)

One mission concludes, another begins
 A hospital ship put to nefarious ends
 The Llandoverly Castle seen by our Halifax spies
 Secretly loading fighting men and military supplies
 To Liverpool she steams with hidden intent
 She'll never arrive, upon that I'm hell-bent

SCENE THREE.

Deck of the Llandoverly Castle, at sea, with Lifeboat #5 close at hand.

MATRON FRASER looks at the sea, deep in thought.
 KATE enters, makes sure nobody else is around.

KATE

Hello, my friend.

MATRON FRASER

Kate! How are you?

KATE

No, how are *you*? Ever concerned for the men, for us nurses. Who ever asks: *Pearl*, how are *you*?

MATRON FRASER

As well as I can be.

KATE

Ah we're a heavy pair, four years into this war. Do you recall how light we were?

MATRON FRASER (BRIGHTENS)

Four years ago, England, embarkment... men, guns, horses streaming aboard.

KATE

On the wharf the murmuring crowd, the band so proud...

MATRON FRASER & KATE

“God save our gracious King!
Long live our noble King!
God save the King!
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious...”

(MATRON FRASER & KATE falter.)

KATE

The port in France, another pier, another throng, jauntily they called...

MATRON FRASER

Vive l'Angleterre! Vive le Canada! And we called back...

KATE

Vive la France! Vive la France! Another band, another anthem...

MATRON FRASER & KATE

Allons enfants de la Patrie, Le jour de gloire est arrivé!

(MATRON FRASER & KATE falter again.)

MATRON FRASER (CONT'D)

Four years ago, when “glory” didn't catch in our throats.

KATE

A lovely French town.

MATRON FRASER

Lovely high houses

KATE

Four flags of the Allies flying high, above every shop

MATRON FRASER

In that grand hotel turned hospital... waiting, waiting. News and rumours, rumours and news, waiting, waiting.

KATE

The grand old Cathedral.

MATRON FRASER & KATE

French widows in black. Stained glass, a Requiem Mass. Stained glass, a Requiem Mass.

(BIRD enters, unnoticed.)

MATRON FRASER

The flood of wounded, at last. Why were we so impatient for the waiting to end? Ah the heaviness returns again.

(MATRON FRASER exits.)

BIRD

You and The Matron are friends?

KATE

Yes indeed. She grew up in Nova Scotia, but now we both call Moose Jaw home.

BIRD

You'd have to be friends or enemies; it's too small to be indifferent! Have you let her know the Front is the last place you want to be?

KATE

I'd never say it plainly, though she can likely tell. Our friendship won't enter into her decision. She is the very definition of integrity. How was Halifax?

BIRD

My family is good, but they worry, especially my dad. I'm the only daughter he has left.

KATE

Oh?

BIRD

One of my sisters died when she was just a baby. The other, Winnie, poor dear, drowned when she was twelve.

(Beat.)

BIRD (CONT'D)

There's a lot of talk about women getting the vote. I say: it's about time!

KATE

Amen!

(BIRD shows Kate a new flashlight.)

BIRD

And I bought a good flashlight! Will come in handy if we're torpedoed.

KATE

Oh, Bird!

(GENERAL ALARM SOUNDS -- BELL or
HORN, 7 SHORT BLASTS or RINGS
FOLLOWED BY 1 LONG ONE.)

KATE (CONT'D)

What did you do!?

BIRD

Lifeboat drill! We're right by our boat.

(SOUNDS of commotion, people hurrying
about.)

KATE

I'll go grab our life belts.

BIRD

Oh, thanks!

(KATE exits. SERGEANT KNIGHT enters,
striding briskly, carrying his life belt.)

BIRD

Sergeant!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Call me Art!

BIRD

Aye, aye, Art!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

I'm with you nurses in Boat Five.

BIRD

Good!

(SERGEANT KNIGHT puts on his life
belt.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

How is your family?

BIRD

A tear or two were spilled on the pier. My father loves me so; who can blame him?!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

It had better be a worthy man who dares ask him for your hand.

BIRD

That man had better ask me!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Have any been brave enough to try?

BIRD

One, if you count Eddie, the cad. I even bought my trousseau, but Eddie got cold feet.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

He's a fool. Sorry to say.

BIRD

I tend to agree with you! When the war began, scared he'd lose me, his feet warmed up again. But I will not be subject to the whims of any man.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

He's the only one, Eddie the cad?

(BIRD hesitates, looks upset.)

Sorry, I shouldn't pry.

BIRD

No, no.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

A soldier, I suppose?

BIRD

Stitched up, sent back to the Front. Always on my mind.

(BIRD pulls a letter out of her pocket.)

Just received a letter. At least I know he's alive. Or that he was a short time ago.

(A dried poppy falls out of the envelope.

BIRD lunges to retrieve it; it is precious.)

He picked a poppy for me.

(Beat.)

How about you -- any sweethearts?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Dear, sweet Alice, waiting for me back home.

(KATE enters, carrying two life belts. NAN, CHRISTINA, and ALEX enter with life belts.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Shake a leg Sisters!

(KATE hands a life vest to BIRD. KATE and BIRD put on their vests, help each other. MAJOR LYON enters, striding fast. MAJOR LYON pauses.)

MAJOR LYON

You're with the nurses, Sergeant?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Yes indeed, sir!

MAJOR LYON

Take care of them! Or, they'll take care of you!

(MAJOR LYON exits.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Now listen up. Use these for pillows when you sleep. We get torpedoed, all the lights go out; you don't want to be searching in the dark.

NAN

We know, Sergeant.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

And your cabin door: never shut it tight. A torpedo hits, every bit of metal on the ship gives a twist... you're trapped like... a bird in a cage.

BIRD

I know you're trying to help but... this isn't our first crossing.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Blighty! I'll just save my breath then!

(MATRON FRASER enters, hustling, putting on her life vest.)

MATRON FRASER

Where are the rest!?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Waiting for a hand-written invitation?

MATRON FRASER

I'll get them cracking!

(MATRON FRASER exits.)

CHRISTINA

She surely will!

(BIRD, KATE, SERGEANT KNIGHT exit.
NAN, CHRISTINA, and ALEX transform
into THE CHORUS.)

THE CHORUS

In war only one thing
Plagues you more
Than sharp memories:
A horrid wondering
A constant, gnawing dread
Will I stay among the living
Or join the many, many dead?

SCENE FOUR.

Nurses' cabins. BIRD sleeps fitfully in her cabin, her life vest serving as her pillow. KATE is also in Bird's cabin. MATRON FRASER sleeps in a larger cabin nearby.

BIRD

No! No!!! Stop it!!!

KATE (WAKES)

What...?

BIRD

No!!!

KATE

Bird? What's the matter?

BIRD

Stop!!!

(MATRON FRASER wakes, goes to Bird
and Kate's cabin.)

MATRON FRASER

Bird!

BIRD

No!!!

MATRON FRASER

Bird, wake up!

(BIRD wakes, startled.)

BIRD

Huh?

MATRON FRASER

You're safe. It's just a nightmare.

BIRD

Sorry.

MATRON FRASER

Nothing to be sorry for. Were you back at the Front?

KATE

I need some air.

(KATE gets up, exits.)

BIRD

A casualty clearing station,
The sound of shells all the day
A long way off you hear them coming
A falsetto motor-engine revving

BIRD (CONT'D)

Near the end the shell's singing scream
 Please God let me live, please
 Then it bursts!

MATRON FRASER

Breathe, and it's back to work

(BIRD steps into a memory. BIRD picks up
 a pail in one hand, a tray of dressings in the
 other.)

BIRD

Two hundred sixty nine cases arrive
 Under cover of pitch black night
 The shells' ghastly work
 Wounds full of straw and dirt
 Legs broken to bits
 Pick axe handles, rifles for splints
 Many will die of sepsis
 Swelling beneath the bandages
 The head wounds delirious
 The stagger, try to escape us
 And oh the pain, the pain
 We bear witness to it over and over again
 I tell myself I'd trade places, take it away
 But would I really, at the end of the day?

MATRON FRASER

Despite it all you do what you can do
 Give them comfort, dress their wounds

BIRD

And you must never allow yourself to muse:
 This has been done to them *on purpose*

(BIRD steps out of the memory.)

BIRD (CONT'D)

All else seems a dream or a play. The Front is real; I should go back today.

MATRON FRASER

No, Bird.

BIRD

You have to send me! It's where I'm needed most, where I can do the most.

MATRON FRASER

I read your reports. You ended shifts, tears streaming down your face. Couldn't sleep to save your soul. Started to make mistakes.

BIRD

I can do better, Matron!

MATRON FRASER

We'll talk again in the morning.

BIRD

It can't wait!

MATRON FRASER

I said: in the morning!

BIRD

Please. How can I make you see?

(THE CHORUS enters, supports
MATRON FRASER.)

MATRON FRASER

A healer must brim with strength

Calm, confident, rock steady

A wounded soldier, utterly at sea

MATRON FRASER (CONT'D)

Looks to you for a sound harbour
 Brought to you filled with pain
 You must have none, to take his away
 A willing vessel to receive
 Turmoil poured into you
 Your eyes, your ears, your hands
 Must be only to care for him
 All that matters is
 His life, his fate
 What must you do to make me see?
 Think long and hard:
 What made you break?
 The very thing that made you lose your way?
 And why, why must you return?
 It's not just me who must know
You have to, in your bones
 You must be sure you're once again whole
 Think deeply, but not tonight
 Clear your mind
 Sleep a deep dreamless sleep
 These questions, they will keep
 Goodnight, Sister, goodnight

SCENE FIVE.

The deck of the ship, a church service. KATE, ALEX, CHRISTINA, NAN, SERGEANT KNIGHT, and MAJOR LYON are present. MATRON FRASER and BIRD join them. All have hymn books. Note: KATE looks lost, uninspired.

ALL sing a medley of great old hymns, e.g. part of "Amazing Grace" including the verse "Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; 'Tis Grace hath brought me safe thus far, And Grace will lead me home", and hymns with nautical themes.

The service ends. ALL put the hymn books away.

THE CHORUS exits.

THE NURSES, SERGEANT KNIGHT, and MAJOR LYON congregate.

MAJOR LYON

An outdoor shipboard service; there's nothing like it. You Sisters sing beautifully.

SERGEANT KNIGHT (TO BIRD)

Is that how you got your nickname -- you sing like a?

MATRON FRASER

I find comfort in those grand old hymns.

KATE

Not me. Not anymore.

MATRON FRASER

Sister! Your father is a minister; what would he think?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

You know what gives me comfort?

MAJOR LYON

Pray tell, Sergeant.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

The dog from Algiers.

MATRON FRASER

I beg your pardon!?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

You never did hear of the dog from Algiers?

BIRD

Tell us!

(SERGEANT KNIGHT puts on quite a show, elicits laughter from everyone except KATE.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

When I'm feeling rather glum
 Sure that Peace will never come
 One thing only brings me cheer
 That thing is the dog from Algiers

ALL (EXCEPT KATE)

Algiers, Algiers, the dog from Algiers

SERGEANT KNIGHT

For war his master had to leave
 Said war was where no dog should be
 Left pooch on pier, boarded ship
 Tried to give his mutt the slip

ALL (EXCEPT KATE)

The slip, the slip, tried to give his the mutt the slip

SERGEANT KNIGHT

The ship began to pull away
 A bark was heard as clear as day
 That little dog what did he do?
 Jumped in the drink in hot pursuit

ALL (EXCEPT KATE)

In pursuit, in pursuit, jumped in the drink in hot pursuit

SERGEANT KNIGHT

A boat the soldiers did let down
 A pooch so fine they'd keep around
 Amazed by his great loyalty
 They treated him like royalty

ALL (EXCEPT KATE)

Royalty , royalty , treated him like royalty

SERGEANT KNIGHT

A good story up to now
It gets much better, and how
You'll agree by the very end
A dog is truly man's best friend

ALL (EXCEPT KATE)

Best friend, best friend, truly man's best friend

SERGEANT KNIGHT

In a muddy trench at the Front
Wincing at the cracking guns
The dog stayed by his master's side
He did not run, did not hide

ALL (EXCEPT KATE)

Did not hide, did not hide, did not run did not hide

SERGEANT KNIGHT

A shell like Thor's hammer struck
Scattering men, scattering muck
No one at first could be seen
The trench was silent and empty

ALL (EXCEPT KATE)

Empty , empty , the trench was silent and empty

SERGEANT KNIGHT

The dog gave a sad, sad whine
Set about his master to find
Sniffing around the deep mud
Dig he did, that little pug

ALL (EXCEPT KATE)

Dig he did, dig he did, that little pug

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Lo and behold what did he find?
His master, barely alive
To him he gave a gentle kiss
Then ran for help lickety-split

ALL (EXCEPT KATE)

Lickety-split, lickety-split, ran for help lickety-split

SERGEANT KNIGHT

His master's life that dog did save
A medal he got for being brave
And to this day many do cheer
At the story of the dog from Algiers!

BIRD, ALEX, NAN, CHRISTINA

Bravo!

MAJOR LYON

Well done, Sergeant!

MATRON FRASER

It's not Amazing Grace. But it is a darling tale.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

And it's true. Almost every word.

NAN (TO KATE)

Good one, eh?

KATE

All it says to me is: even a dog has more decency than human beings.

(KATE exits.)

BIRD

Kate!

(BIRD exits, goes after Kate. SERGEANT KNIGHT, MAJOR LYON, the other NURSES look to MATRON FRASER for an explanation.)

MATRON FRASER

She is in a sad, dark place. Woe to any of us in this war, who can no longer keep the faith.

SCENE SIX.

Kate & Bird's cabin. KATE has locked herself in, sprawled on her bed. BIRD enters, knocks on the cabin door.

BIRD

Kate? Let me in. Kate!

KATE

Go away!

BIRD

You shouldn't have the door shut! What's wrong? I want to help.

KATE

You can't!

BIRD

Why not?

KATE

You can't reverse a pledge!

BIRD

What?

KATE

The war, plus six months. That's what I promised. I'd give anything to take it back.

BIRD

I know it's hard.

KATE

No! Hard I can handle. It's hopeless

BIRD

Don't say that.

KATE

It's true!

BIRD

No!

(MATRON FRASER enters, unseen by
Bird.)

KATE

You're a fool if you can't see it
Our efforts have no use
What's left of men on stretchers
Brought to us, bloody, screaming, gassed
What do we do for them?
Stitch them up
Ship them back to the Front
Repeat all over again
Or if they're too broken
Pack them off on a hospital ship
Send them away maimed, haunted
By the nightmare that they lived
I see their future
And it makes me sick
Blind drunk in a bar
Trying to blot out what happened afar
"Heroes" who wished they'd never lived
The war plus six months, I promised
And I fulfill every pledge I make
Listen, here's another:
When I'm finally done
I'll never nurse again
Until my dying day

(MATRON FRASER is about to step into
the situation but stops, waits to see Bird's
reaction.)

BIRD

Kate that's not the whole story
 You know it very well
 Like me, you just forgot
 As you trudged through nine circles of Hell
 Lately I've been where you are
 Bitter, poisoned with despair
 I remember a baby-faced soldier
 I'm about to dress his awful wounds
 "I'll try my best to not hurt you" I assure
 With dead eyes he retorts: "I don't care"
 That cut me to the quick
 Made me feel: I can't take this anymore
 But later that same night
 Another young, hurt soldier arrived
 Devastated, desperate, something eating him alive
 To me alone he whispered, *he whispered*, his heart-rending tale
 How he tried to save his best friend's life, and failed
 When he was done, together, we did weep
 And after that he could finally go to sleep
 Often I think of him, that moment of light,
 Wonder: what if no one had been there for him that night?
 And here's a secret, between me and you
 As I nursed that soldier back to health
 We fell in love despite ourselves
 Imagine, in this world pitch black with hate
 Love still flickers, tenderness remains
 It's not all horror, this war
 A man risking his life for another
 The care, compassion we offer
 Friendship, love for each other
 Don't tell me it's nothing
 Don't tell me there's only darkness
 I know that's not the truth

(KATE opens up the door. KATE and BIRD
 embrace. PEARL, deeply moved and
 relieved, watches for a moment, then exits.)

SCENE SEVEN.

On deck, MAJOR LYON gazes at the sea. Dusk approaches. MATRON FRASER enters.

Matron.
MAJOR LYON

Call me Pearl.
MATRON FRASER

I'm Tom.
MAJOR LYON

You look like a Tom!
MATRON FRASER

Is that good or bad?
MAJOR LYON

Good!
MATRON FRASER

MAJOR LYON
What a relief! How is your nurse, the one who got upset?

MATRON FRASER
Much better, thanks.

MAJOR LYON
Good to hear. And what of your big task -- deciding which wrecks can be salvaged?

MATRON FRASER
Clarity emerges. Ordo Ab Chao... out of chaos, order.

MAJOR LYON
I'm glad you think so
These days it's easier to believe
Chaos only breeds more chaos
In the human mind particularly
I do my utmost to stitch the body back together

MAJOR LYON (CONT'D)

Even more daunting, to cure the mind...
 All the horrors that we have been seen
 The fathomless monstrosities
 How do you go forward?
 Not despair of the human race?
 Find in this cesspool
 Some dram of saving grace?

MATRON FRASER

If I may be quite bold
 Set aside all false humility
 To discover answers to your questions
 Perhaps look to you and yours, to mine and me
 While so many clamour to kill
 We strive only to save lives
 While so many radiate hatred, cruelty
 We glow with goodwill and sympathy
 German prisoners I've cared for
 Just as well as our own troops
 Written down the dying words
 Of their soldiers, and ours, for all families
 Where are our better angels?
 To whom can humanity turn for hope?
 Look in the mirror, Tom
 We healers are the best of us

MAJOR LYON

When I heard women would serve as my fellow officers
 Ashamedly I was, at first, opposed
 Little did I imagine what strength and wisdom
 You would offer at the time they're needed most

SCENE EIGHT.

Conning tower of the German submarine U-86 which is
 on the surface, dusk. PATZIG peers out.

PATZIG

Behold, the prize
 Brightly lit, no attempt to hide
 Unsuspecting, unaware that
 Great peril lurks
 In the turbulent Celtic Sea
 A ship different from all the others
 Not considered fair game
 One torpedo unleashes
 Death, and perhaps terrible blame

(THE CHORUS enters.)

THE CHORUS

Patzig, there are laws to follow
 Even in this vile war
 If you become a criminal
 You're a soldier no more
 You will be condemned throughout the whole world
 Even by good men in your crew, and your own country men
 Show mercy

PATZIG

You'll find no mercy here
 A torpedo I will unleash
 To smash the Llandoverly Castle,
 Send it to the bottom of the Celtic Sea

SCENE NINE.

KATE and BIRD are in their cabin. KATE has her nightdress on, is ready to retire for the night. BIRD writes in a journal. MATRON FRASER is in her cabin, reading.

BIRD

Early to bed tonight?

KATE

I have a feeling I will sleep peacefully, for a change.

BIRD

In this choppy water?

KATE

I hardly notice. What are you putting in your diary?

BIRD

Only good things about you! I'll be right back.

(BIRD tucks away her journal, goes to
MATRON FRASER's door, knocks.)

MATRON FRASER

Come in.

BIRD

Matron?

MATRON FRASER

Bird! What's on your mind?

BIRD

You asked me some good questions. I'm glad to say: I have the answers.

MATRON FRASER

I know.

BIRD

You do?!

MATRON FRASER

You led a fellow Sister out of a dark chasm of despair.

BIRD

I was down in there with her.

MATRON FRASER

In guiding her, though unsure, you found the way out. It is plain to me: your strength, dear Bird, has returned.

BIRD

So...?!

MATRON FRASER

You're heading back to France.

(BIRD embraces MATRON FRASER.)

BIRD

What I see now is: *I* decide... to languish in darkness, or step into the light.

MATRON FRASER

Dear Bird: we all do.

(HUGE EXPLOSION, knocking BIRD,
MATRON FRASER, and KATE about, and
THE LIGHTS GO OUT.)

KATE

Ah!

BIRD

What...?!

(SOUNDS OF MEN SHOUTING.)

MATRON FRASER

A torpedo? We have to get topside!

BIRD

I have a flashlight!

(BIRD feels her way to her cabin. THE
GENERAL ALARM SOUNDS.)

BIRD (CONT'D)

Kate?!

KATE

We're hit?!

(BIRD clicks on her flashlight.)

BIRD

Have to hurry!

(BIRD grabs her lifebelt.)

KATE

I'm in my nightdress!

BIRD

There's no time!

(BIRD thrusts Kate's lifebelt into KATE's hands, pulls KATE along.)

KATE

We're tilting, already! That's bad!

(BIRD and KATE meet up with MATRON FRASER.)

KATE

Pearl!

MATRON FRASER

Sisters: courage!

(THE NURSES move swiftly, purposefully together.)

SCENE TEN.

On deck. SOUNDS of SHOUTING, COMMOTION. SERGEANT KNIGHT enters, on the run (struggling with his balance on the tilting deck), gets to Lifeboat #5 and looks around anxiously.

ALEX, NAN, and CHRISTINA enter, hurry to the lifeboat, also struggling with their balance.

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Sisters! Climb aboard!

NAN

How bad is it?

(ALEX, NAN, and CHRISTINA climb into
the lifeboat.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

We're going down at the head, fast. Where is Bird?!

(BIRD, KATE, and MATRON FRASER
enter.)

BIRD

Art!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

It's about bloody time! In!

MATRON FRASER

Hold it together, Sergeant!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Yes Matron!

(KATE, BIRD, and MATRON FRASER
climb aboard. MATRON FRASER counts
the nurses in the boat.)

(THE NURSES begin to sing/chant. Whoever
is not singing other lines repeats
underneath.)

THE NURSES

A deepening sense of doom
We know what the sea can do
A deepening sense of doom
We know what the sea can do

SERGEANT KNIGHT (CONT'D)

We got everybody?

MATRON FRASER

All present and accounted for, Sergeant.

(MAJOR LYON enters, on the run, pauses
for a moment.)

MAJOR LYON

You off, Sergeant?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Yes sir!

MAJOR LYON

I'm with the captain, in his lifeboat; let's look for each other on the water, if we can!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Fine by me, sir!

(SERGEANT KNIGHT climbs aboard
Lifeboat #5. MAJOR LYON dashes away,
exits.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT (CONT'D)

Hang on, Sisters. It's going to be rough!

(SERGEANT KNIGHT and THE NURSES
lower the lifeboat. SOUNDS of WAVES
POUNDING AGAINST THE SHIP.)

(The lifeboat reaches the water. The waves
crash the lifeboat against the ship, THE
NURSES and SERGEANT KNIGHT
stumble.)

ALL

Ah! Whoa!

(SERGEANT KNIGHT tries to get the ropes to release but cannot.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Bloody hell!

MATRON FRASER

What?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Ropes won't let go!!

(A big wave smashes the lifeboat into the side of the ship, sending ALL sprawling.)

ALL

Ah!

BIRD

The oars! Use them to brace ourselves!

ALEX

Bon idee!

(THE NURSES grab the oars, brace against the side of the ship.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Bloody ropes!

(SERGEANT KNIGHT grabs an axe.)

BIRD

What are you doing!?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Trying to cut the ropes, before we're battered to bits, or dragged down with the ship!

MATRON FRASER

Mind yourselves, Sisters!

(SERGEANT KNIGHT hacks at the ropes with the axe. Another big wave hits. One of the oars breaks. The axe breaks.)

CHRISTINA

Ah! Oar broke!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Damned axe, too!

(BIRD spots another axe in the boat, holds it up.)

BIRD

Here!

(SERGEANT KNIGHT grabs the axe, goes at the ropes again.)

CHRISTINA

Why did they torpedo us?! We're a hospital ship!

(Another big wave. The remaining oars break.)

BIRD

No!! That's all the oars.

(Suddenly the ropes release.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

The ropes!

ALL (EXCEPT THE SERGEANT)

Hurray!

(The lifeboat drifts a bit away from the side of the ship.)

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Don't celebrate yet! Have to get away from the ship. The suction, when she goes under... she'll pull us down with her.

SCENE ELEVEN.

Deck of the German submarine U-86, on the surface, night. PATZIG holds a pistol.

MAJOR LYON is thrown roughly, sprawls at PATZIG's feet.

MAJOR LYON

Ah! My leg!

PATZIG

Major.

MAJOR LYON

You're the one responsible for this?!

(MAJOR LYON struggles to a standing position, all his weight on one leg.)

MAJOR LYON (CONT'D)

Do you realize we're a hospital ship?!

PATZIG

Of course.

MAJOR LYON

You do?!

PATZIG

How many American aviators were you bringing across?

MAJOR LYON

Yankee pilots?! None!

PATZIG

Are you an American aviator?

MAJOR LYON

Me?! I'm a Canadian surgeon!

PATZIG

What sort of munitions were you carrying?

MAJOR LYON

No munitions! No fighting men! We had nurses and doctors... bandages, iodine. And you attack us?! You're a damnable coward!

PATZIG

Careful, Major.

MAJOR LYON (HEART-BROKEN)

You... have no idea of the quality of the men and *women* on that ship you've shot all to hell.

PATZIG (CALLS OFF)

Throw him back in his lifeboat.

(MAJOR LYON hobbles back from whence he came.)

MAJOR LYON

Damnable coward!

(MAJOR LYON is seized, dragged.)

Ah!!

(MAJOR LYON exits. PATZIG paces. THE CHORUS enters.)

PATZIG

This will be put to ill use
 Against my great country
 I have no choice
 I must efface its every trace

(PATZIG turns his back on The Chorus.)

PATZIG (CALLS HARSHLY)

Mit mir -- Dithmar, Meissner, Boldt;
 Alle anderen mander -- gehe unter!

SCENE TWELVE.

In lifeboat #5. SOUNDS of DROWNING MEN calling
 for HELP.

THE NURSES

A deepening sense of doom
 I know what the sea can do
 A deepening sense of doom
 I know what the sea can do

BIRD (TO MEN IN THE WATER)

Over here!

KATE

Swim to us! We can't get to you!

(BANG, BANG, BANG -- firing of the deck
 gun of the U-boat -- then EXPLOSIONS.)

CHRISTINA

What's that?!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Bloody hell! Sorry, Matron.

MATRON FRASER

No, Sergeant. Say it again!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Bloody hell!!

NAN

What's happening?

MATRON FRASER

He is shooting at the lifeboats?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Bloody right!

THE NURSES

A deepening sense of doom

I know what men can do

A deepening sense of doom

I know what men can do

(BANG, BANG, BANG of the deck gun,
EXPLOSIONS.)

BIRD

How could they?!

(SUDDENLY A HUGE CACOPHONY of
TEARING METAL from the ship,
followed by SOUNDS of MASSIVE
SPLASHING, HUGE DISPLACEMENT
OF WATER.)

NAN

Ah!

KATE

What...?!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Entire afterdeck broke away, sank. Begetting... a monster of a whirlpool.

BIRD

It's got us in its grip... pulling us right in.

(THE NURSES stop singing/chanting,
become quite composed.)

MATRON FRASER

Is there any hope for us, Sergeant?

Is there any hope for us, Sergeant?

THE NURSES

Is there any hope for us Sergeant?

Is there any hope for us, Sergeant?

SERGEANT KNIGHT (INTERNAL)

How can I answer?

The nurses showing no fear, unflinching in death's face

MATRON FRASER

My poor family just buried my brother

BIRD

I'll drown as I feared like poor Winnie

CHRISTINA

I'll never again behold the beauty of the Rockies

KATE

At least it will be a quick, clean death

ALEX

Sainte Marie, mere de Dieu

Priez pour nous

BIRD

My father he will fall down, he will weep

ALEX

Maintenant a l'heure de notre mort

BIRD

I will never hold my love again

THE NURSES

Is there any hope for us Sergeant?

Is there any hope for us, Sergeant?

SERGEANT KNIGHT

No, dear Sisters. There is no hope.

(Sound of RUSHING WATER. THE
NURSES join THE CHORUS.)

SCENE THIRTEEN.

In the dark, sounds of SERGEANT KNIGHT surfacing,
struggling, going underwater again.

THE CHORUS

You can survive, Sergeant

(Again, SERGEANT KNIGHT surfaces,
goes under.)

THE CHORUS (CONT'D)

If you live: you must bear witness

(A third time SERGEANT KNIGHT
surfaces, grabs a piece of wreckage, stays
above water, gasping.)

THE CHORUS (CONT'D)

It must be known, what was done

It must be known, what was lost

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Help! Help me!

MAJOR LYON in the bow of the captain's lifeboat. It
looks like Lifeboat #5 except it also has a sail (currently
furled).

BANG, BANG, BANG of the gun, EXPLOSIONS
CLOSE BY, MAJOR LYON ducks.

MAJOR LYON

Ah!!

THE CHORUS

You can survive, Major

(BOOM of the gun, another EXPLOSION
RIGHT BY THE LIFEBOAT.)

MAJOR LYON (CONT'D)

He's got his range! We're goners!

THE CHORUS

If you live: you must bear witness

(MAJOR LYON braces for more shells,
which does not come.)

MAJOR LYON

He's... he's moving off! Maybe he thinks he got us. He's moving off!!!

(The lifeboat's sail is unfurled.)

MAJOR LYON (CONT'D)

Godspeed, Captain!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Help! Help!

MAJOR LYON

Man in the water! There! To starboard! Okay, steady on! You there!! Hold on!! We're coming for you!! Here!! I've got you!!

(MAJOR LYON grabs SERGEANT
KNIGHT's hand, hauls him into the
lifeboat.)

MAJOR LYON (CONT'D)

Are you alright, man?

(MAJOR LYON recognizes him, reacts with
astonishment.)

Sergeant!?! Is that you?!

SERGEANT KNIGHT

Major!

THE CHORUS

You must bear witness

MAJOR LYON

The nurses...?

(SERGEANT KNIGHT breaks down, can't
look at MAJOR LYON.)

MAJOR LYON (CONT'D)

Oh no!

THE CHORUS

You must bear witness

SERGEANT KNIGHT

You should have seen them Major. Staring down death, steady, brave as can be.

LYON & KNIGHT

We must bear witness

THE CHORUS

There will be rage
Rage won't honour us
There will be bigotry
Bigotry is not a fit legacy
There will revenge by our own side, at Amiens --
Murder of soldiers raising hands in surrender --
Revenge is an abomination to us!

LYON & KNIGHT

We must bear witness

THE CHORUS

Sergeant you'll tell the tale of our very last moments

SERGEANT KNIGHT

We must bear witness

THE CHORUS

Major you'll cross miles by the thousands

By rail and sea

To testify, tell the world of this atrocity

MAJOR LYON

We must bear witness

LYON & KNIGHT

They were a beacon in the darkness

For those in pain, they gave comfort

They faced horror and death unflinching

To the hurt and weak, they supplied great strength

For the despairing, they lit a candle of hope

THE CHORUS

You must bear witness

ALL (TO AUDIENCE)

You must bear witness

In the darkest of times

There were those who chose

To walk in the light

In the darkest of times

There were those who chose

To walk in the light