

# ***THE FORBIDDEN ZONE***

**BY**

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## **BOMBARDMENT**

THE wide sweet heaven was filling with light: the perfect dome of night was changing into day. A million silver worlds dissolved from above the earth : the sun was about to rise in stillness : no wind stirred.

A speck appeared in the great immensity. It was an aeroplane travelling high through the mysterious twilight. The sound of the whirring of its engine was lost in the depthless air: like a ghost it flew through the impalpable firmament: it was the only thing that moved in heaven and earth.

The unconscious map lay spread out beneath it: the wide plain, the long white beach and the sea, lay there exposed to its speeding eye.

On the face of the plain were villages and cities; the dwellings of men who had put their trust in the heavens and had dared to people the earth. The aeroplane turned in the sky and began circling over the town.

The town far below was asleep. It lay pillowed on the secure shore; violet shadows leaned against its pale buildings ; there was no movement in its streets ; no smoke from its chimneys. The ships lay still in the deep close harbour; their masts rose out of the green water like reeds thickly growing with the great funnels and turrets of warships like strange plants among them. The sea beyond the strong breakwater was smooth as a silver plate ; there was no sound anywhere.

The aeroplane descended in slow spirals upon the town, tracing an invisible path through the pearly air. It was as if a messenger from heaven were descending upon the people of the town who dreamed.

Suddenly a scream burst from the throat of the church tower. For an instant the sky seemed to shiver with the stab of that wail of terror rising from the great stone throat. Surely the town would waken in a panic--- and yet, no, nothing stirred. There was no sound or movement in any street and the sky gave back no sign.

The aeroplane continued to descend until it looked from the church tower like a mosquito; then there dropped something from it that flashed through the air, a spark of fire.

Silence had followed the scream.

The aeroplane, superbly poised now in the spotless sky, watched the buildings below it as if waiting for some strange thing to happen; and presently, as if exorcised by the magic eye of that insect, a cluster of houses collapsed, while a roar burst from the wounded earth.

The bombardment had commenced. The big gun hiding in the sand-dunes in Belgium had obeyed the signal.

Still, the neat surface of the wide city showed no change, save in that one spot where the houses had fallen. How slow to wake the town was! The daylight brightened, painting the surfaces of the buildings with pale rose and primrose. The clean empty streets cut the city into firm blocks of buildings ; the pattern of the town spread out on the earth, with its neat edges marked by walls and canals, gleamed like a varnished map.

Then the siren in the church tower screamed again; its wail was followed by a second roar and a ragged hole yawned in the open square in the middle of the town.

The aeroplane circled smoothly, watching.

And at last signs of terror and bewilderment appeared in the human ant hill beneath it. Distracted midgets swarmed from the houses : this way and that they scurried, diving into openings in the ground: swift armoured beetles rushed through the streets; white jets of steam rose from the locomotives in the station yard : the harbour throbbed.

Again there was a great noise, and a cloud of debris was flung into the air as from a volcano, and flames leapt after it. A part of the wharf with a shed on it reeled drunkenly into the sea with a splash.

The white beach was crawling now with vermin; the human hive swarmed out on to the sands. Their eyes were fixed on the evil flying thing in the sky and at each explosion they fell on their faces like frantic worshippers.

The aeroplane cavorted, whirling after its tail in an ecstasy of self-gratification. Down among the sand-dunes it could see the tiny black figures of men at the anti-aircraft guns. These were the defenders of the town ; they had orders to shoot to death a mosquito floating in boundless heaven. The little clouds that burst in the sunlight were like materialised kisses.

The face of the city had begun to show a curious change. Scars appeared on it like the marks of smallpox and as these thickened on its trim surface, it seemed as if it were being attacked by an invisible and gigantic beast, who was tearing and gnawing it with claws and teeth. Gashes appeared in its streets, long wounds with ragged edges. Helpless, spread out to the heavens, it grimaced with mutilated features.

Nevertheless the sun rose, touching the aeroplane with gold, and the aeroplane laughed. It laughed at the convulsed face of the town, at the beach crawling with vermin, at the ant people swarming through the gates of the city along the white roads ; it laughed at the warships moving out of the harbour one by one in stately procession, the mouths of their guns gaping helplessly in their armoured sides. With a last flick of its glittering wings, it darted downward defiant, dodging the kisses of shrapnel, luring them, teasing them, playing with them : then, its message delivered, its sport over, it flew up and away in the sunshine and disappeared. A speck in the infinite sky, then nothing---and the town was left in convulsions.

## **THE REGIMENT**

THERE was no sign of horror in the heavens or upon the earth. The summer world was deep, immense, beautiful. High white clouds were moving slowly towards Belgium, moving without movement through a sky ineffably blue, superb castles of white vapour, floating towards a land

called No Man's Land, and their shadows were flung like banners far below over the green meadows and fields of yellow corn.

An aeroplane was visiting the romantic city of the sky. A fearless, capricious, gay glittering creature of pleasure, it flew through the glistening portals and disappeared, bent on mysterious adventure.

The smiling country was enjoying itself. The caress of the wind sent shudders of pleasure through the corn and a fluttering delight through the trees. Along the road banks scarlet poppies were winking their little black eyes. Like grizzled dwarfs squatting on pedestals in the fields, the windmills waved their arms in grotesque gaiety.

War had that day the aspect of a country fair. The armies were gipsy caravans vagabonding over the country. Swarms of little men were housekeeping in the open. Their camp fires, their pots and pans, and their garments hung out to dry on bushes, twinkled and fluttered through the furbelowed country side. Here and there near a stream, a cluster of tents, gaudily painted, suggested a circus.

The pug villages tucked between the fields of high golden corn and scattered clumps of woodland hummed like beehives, sheltering an army in their warm farmyards and barns and cottages, and the army in reserve waited comfortably, sharing the lovely day with the cattle, the great farm horses, the pigs and chickens.

Ten miles from the Belgian frontier a low-browed, moody town dozed on the banks of a canal. Folded close between its great gates, it was deep as a dark well in the midst of the bright flighty country. The dull ochre walls of the houses soaked up the sunlight. Their shutters were closed. The barges in the canal were motionless, their great bosoms sunk deep in the cool water. From the quiet streets and close-lidded houses the spirit of the place was being distilled in the sunlight. It was as if the sun were drawing the melancholy soul out of the weary, proud old body of the town. Reluctantly it gave up its secret. The memories of its troubled history and of how it had defended a passionate egoism on the threshold of an alien nation, spread upon the sunny air like a dark and bitter perfume.

A regiment was marching along the high road towards the town. In the distance, looking towards Belgium, you could see it coming down the white road. It was a shadow moving across the bright surface of the country against the wind and against the shadows of the clouds. It looked like the shadow of a snake.

There was, however, no snake visible in the lovely sky, and on a nearer view the shadow became a column of hunchbacks, a herd of deformed creatures driven on together, each one like another one. It was a French territorial regiment. It had come out of the trenches that morning, and from the trenches it was marching toward the town.

It was a moving mass of men covered over with the cloth of fatigue. Over them was their suffocating weariness, and under them was the dust of the road. They moved along, bending forward as if the space between the weight that lay on them and the dusty road under them was not wide enough to hold them upright. They moved laboriously through the dust, as if they were dragging chains. But there was no sound from them save the dull sound of their feet tramping the road.

The regiment was a regiment of old men. Their faces were old and their clothes were old and their bodies were old, and the spirit in them was old. There was no youth in any one of them.

They marched steadily along the road. Their gait was the steady jolting gait of weary animals. They did not look quite like men. One could not be certain what kind of men they were. One could only be certain that they were not young. They had not quite the colour nor the shape of men. The war had spread over them its own colour. They were dark against the bright mirage of summer. They were of a deep, dull courageous hue. Their faces and their hands and their coats were all stained with the same stain, no longer blue, no longer brown. Fatigue and suffering and dirt had soaked through them and had made them this colour.

And they were all deformed, and certainly their deformity was the deformity of the war. They were not misshapen in different ways. They were all misshapen in the same way. Each one was deformed like the next one. Each one had been twisted and bent in the same way. Each one carried the same burden that bowed his back, the same knapsack, the same roll of blanket, the same flask, the same dangling box, the same gun. Each one dragged swollen feet in the same thick-crusted boots. The same machine had twisted and bent them all. They did not look quite like men, and yet they were men.

Nor did they behave like men. They did not look about them as they marched along the road. They did not talk as they marched close together. They did not stop marching, never for a moment did they stop marching. They did not shift their burdens to ease them. They did not notice the milestones as they passed. They paid no attention to the signposts at the cross roads. They did not wipe the sweat off their faces. They did not behave like men walking through pleasant country, and yet they assuredly were men.

I saw in their eyes that they were men. They marched with their eyes fixed on the rough bent backs of those in front, on the rough backs of their companions who were too old to be comrades. And in their deep fixed eyes, sunk under grizzled eyebrows, there was a strange expression, the expression of profound knowledge. They were old men and they knew. There were many things they did not know; they did not know where they were going; they did not know why they were going there; they did not know how far they had to go, or how long they would rest there; but two things they did know; they knew that they were not going home, and they knew that they were condemned to death. They knew this; they had always known. They understood and they did not complain. France was at war. They were old men. Their sons had been killed. They were taking the place of their sons.

There was no elasticity in them, nor any enthusiasm, nor any passion; but they were patient. Being old men, there was nothing they could not accept; there was nothing they could not endure. They had endured fatigue and cold and hunger and wet. They had endured so long that they had ceased to think about these things. Their weariness was a thing of such long standing that they thought of it no more. Their uncleanness had become a habit to them. Suffering was a part of their rations. They were acclimatised to misery. Death was a part of the equipment they carried always with them. The war had no interest for them nor any terror. They accepted the war. It was a thing to be endured. They were enduring it.

There was only one thing they wanted, and this thing they wanted without hope. They wanted to go home, and they knew they were not going home. Out of the deep comfort of the warm dear holes they had dug for themselves in the land they loved, these old men had been called

to war, the bleak desert of death. Each one had been torn up out of the deep place he had made. Like old trees, strong rooted, they had grown into the soil of France, and they had been torn up and carted away to die, and in the place each one had left there was a gaping hole.

They remembered their homes as they marched along the road. They did not look about them as they walked through the bright country that was enjoying itself, because this country was not their home and they were too tired to look up.

They were coming away from the trenches and they were tired. They were relieved of the strain of imminent death, but the relief made them only more tired. And what was the good of coming away from the trenches if they were not going home? Long ago they had gone into the trenches. They had crawled laboriously into them, their old bodies creaking, their gouty souls wincing, and they had learned how to live in those ditches.

Carefully with great caution they had learned how to endure them. They had smoked innumerable pipes in them and had chewed loaves of bread; they had slept and waked and received letters from home. Then, with the same creaking of their joints they had come out of the trenches. Some of them had not come out, but those that were left had come out.

Now they were going along the road.

They did not know where they were going; they only knew that they were not going home. It was all the same to them as long as they could not go home.

The aeroplane, glittering in the sun, was still circling through the citadel of the sky. High it flew. It flew high! It flew higher again, and still higher.

The regiment was chained to the earth. The men were chained to the ground. They were heavy; they were fastened down. The mass of them jolted along, a dark weight scraping the road. Their flag alone was lifted. It moved fluttering above their heads, tattered and soiled. It was there for an emblem of hope. They ignored it. They did not see it. Long ago they had ceased to regard it.

So they marched toward the town.

In the centre of the big sleepy square of the town was a group of fine little men in costume. They were waiting for the regiment that was marching along the road, and they were waiting for the General who commanded the army, the General-in-Chief, their own General. These fine little men were officers. One could not be certain that they had anything to do with the war, but one could be certain that they were officers. Their trim figures, polished and clean and neatly put together and nicely covered in scarlet and blue cloth and brown leather, stood upright in the centre of the square. The wide expanse of cobblestones on which they stood glistened like a sheet of opaque glass. From the four sides of the square the wise houses watched under ruminating brows. It was difficult to tell what the houses thought of the officers in the square. It was difficult to tell what the officers were doing there in the middle of the square. Certainly they were waiting, but they seemed to be busily, nervously waiting. They could not keep still. They seemed conscious of the stare of the houses. They drew themselves up very straight. Their arms made quick gestures; their gloved hands twirled their moustaches; their neat heels tapped the pavement smartly. They bowed to one another elaborately.

There was variety among these officers. No one was like another one. Not one had gestures like another one. Not one had clothes like another one. Certainly they were individuals. One was a

slim, graceful one; one was a flabby one; one was an elegant one; one a tall, very stiff one; one was a pot-bellied one. Each remained the same one he had been before the war. They were varnished over with a military varnish, but beneath the varnish appeared distinctly the small individuality of each one. It was curious to see such fine shiny men in the centre of the old haggard town.

The hard knobbed palm of the square held them up to the view of the sky.

Through the east gate of the town the regiment came into the town dragging its weight and its darkness, and it poured its darkness into the square. It poured through the gap of the street into the square, and it came to a stand. It was a dark mass of tenacity, inert, incurious, obstinate, one man beside another man, each one like the next one, close packed together between the pale dreaming houses.

The regiment brought truth into the square. It was a fact, a darkness, a weight filling one side of the square.

And with the regiment war appeared in the square.

The town shuddered under the tramping feet of the regiment.

The men of the regiment stood close packed together. The mass of their round metal helmets gleamed like a beach of smooth pebbles before the windows of the houses, and their bayonets shot up like a forest of knives flashing in the sunlight.

The town shuddered. But there was sympathy between the regiment and the town.

The town said to the regiment:

"You old ones, you are strangers; but we know you. You come from the war. You are welcome."

The regiment said to the town:

"You are kind, but you'd do well to keep your welcome for those who can use it. We are old. We want nothing since we cannot go home."

"Rest here awhile, old ones," repeated the town.

"No, we cannot stay. We do not belong here. You are old, too, like us; but we are too tired to make friends with you, though we thank you."

The group of officers said to the regiment:

"Look spry now. You're to be inspected by the General, and we are to receive decorations."

The regiment didn't answer. It had nothing to say to the staff officers. It did not recognise them. Its own officers-yes; but these it did not know, and the staff officers were embarrassed by the obstinacy and the stupidity and weariness of the regiment. They fidgeted on the edge of its darkness.

While the regiment and the officers waited in the square for the General, the aeroplane flew down from the cloud castles in the sky and circled over the town crying gaily:

"Look at me. Look at me, you heavy old ones, I can fly." The officers looked up at the aeroplane. The regiment did not look up.

The officers said to themselves:

"That silly aeroplane is amusing itself, but we are going to receive decorations."

The regiment remained silent. It took no notice.

A bugle sounded, heralding the approach of the General, but instead of the General a woman came into the square. She came in a motor with glass windows. Her shining car stopped in front of the regiment. She opened the door of the motor and put out her white foot and stepped down, and her delicate body dressed in the white uniform of a hospital was exposed to the view of the officers and the regiment. Her head was bound close with a white kerchief. A red cross burned on her forehead.

She was a beautiful animal dressed as a nun and branded with a red cross. Her shadowy eyes said to the regiment:

"I came to the war to nurse you and comfort you."

The regiment said nothing. It did not know what to say. It was merely puzzled.

Her red mouth said to the officers:

"I am here for you."

And the officers said:

"We know why you are here."

The eyes of the officers followed the white shining woman as she moved through the sunlight, and they rested on her as she stood in a shadowed doorway.

The presence of the woman was a teasing current of delight touching the officers.

To the regiment the woman was a puzzle, but the old ones were too tired to bother about puzzles.

To the town she was a strange fantastic thing, like a white peacock.

The town said to itself: "This curious creature has gone astray. It has the appearance of being expensive. It must have escaped from its owner who, no doubt, prizes it highly; but that is none of our business."

The clock in the church tower marked three o'clock.

Suddenly a cry burst from the regiment, and a shout burst from the trumpets and horns and drums of the regiment. It rang through the square shivering against the houses. The little people of the town came to their doorways. The rosy faces of the comfortable women and the round children spread round the square like a smile, and the hoarse passionate voice of the old rusty regiment rose bravely in welcome.

The General came.

He appeared at the far end of the square, a small solid figure standing alone. He existed apart, isolated. He stood at a distance, a solitary man, concentrating the attention of the town.

He came across the square alone, growing larger and larger as he came. He covered the ground with long strides. His gloved hand was on the hilt of his sword. When he reached the centre of the square, he wheeled and faced the regiment, a stone giant, solid as granite, commanding the attention of every man in the square. He ignored the officers and faced the regiment. And the town watching saw a curious thing. The bodies of the hunchbacks straightened under the eyes of the General. It was as if the iron arm of the stone man raised to salute them had lifted the weariness from the deformed shoulders of those old ones.

It was evident to the town that the General understood the regiment. It was evident that he knew what they knew. And with this dark knowledge he faced them. The trumpets and drums were hushed. A strange silence filled the square, and in silence the General summoned the regiment to meet his eyes. He took full in the face its dumb message. The weight he had lifted from it fell on him. The darkness drowning it flowed into him. He accepted it. He did not dodge it or bend under the weight of it. He stood rigid before the eyes of the regiment challenging its knowledge. The weary eyes of the old territorials were fixed on his white head and deep stony face. They searched him, and they saw that he knew what they knew, that there was nothing about the war that he didn't know, and they were satisfied.

The General said to the regiment:

"You are mine. Your sons have been killed. France had need of you and you came. You must die for France as your sons died. You left your homes to come to the war. You will never go home again. You will go back to the trenches. It is I who will send you back there. Again and again you will go back to those ditches, by my orders, until you are killed as your sons were killed. You are mine for the war. I carry the weight of your obedience and your patience. You will be patient until death. I know you."

The regiment answered the General:

"It is for our homes and for our sons. We are here because our sons are gone to protect the homes we cannot go back to. You are the one we obey."

There was truth between the regiment and the General.

And the old town looking on, said:

"Clearly this is a great man. A hundred years ago there came here such a one as this, and he was a great man. We, too, are acquainted with war and with armies. We have seen thousands of little men, and we have seen some big men. We know that this is a great man."

From the regiment the General turned to the officers and the town perceived that the relation of the General to his officers was a complex thing. It was as complicated as a formal dance or pantomime on a stage. The officers knew their steps. They had apparently rehearsed the performance. The General treated the officers with elaborate ceremony. He was there to decorate them. The decorating of the officers was a ceremony, and he performed the ceremony with the skill of an actor. It was a pretty play in which the General played the principal rôle. He played it with solemnity. He saluted each one in turn, the long one, and the pale one and the pot-bellied one. He drew his sword from its scabbard; it flashed in the sun as he laid it upon their shoulders. On the left shoulder and upon the right shoulder of the Colonel he laid his sword. He pinned a medal on the Colonel's elegant chest and then he kissed him on the left

cheek and on the right cheek. He did the same with each officer in turn. He called each one by name and addressed him in a loud voice of commendation. He laid on each one his sword and he kissed each one on both cheeks, and on the chest of each one he left a bit of ribbon and a bright medal.

The regiment in the background was the chorus for this pretty play. After each kiss and each decoration the trumpets and drums of the regiment cried aloud in congratulation. Kisses and bits of ribbon and a graceful flashing sword, these little things passed between the General and his officers. No truth passed between them----nothing but a play.

And the play was ended.

And the General went away as he had come, taking with him the pride and the courage that he had brought into the square.

The face of the town grew dull as it watched him go. The women and the children disappeared into the dim houses. The white strange woman looked after him with vague, troubled eyes, not noticing the officers who advanced towards her, elaborately bowing.

The regiment lowered its bayonets at his going and bowed its shoulders. Its darkness grew more dark, and its weariness more heavy. When the General had gone it became again a shapeless mass of dark, weary hunchbacks.

The clock in the church tower marked five o'clock when the regiment left the square. It marched out of the town and along the road as it had come.

A regiment of old men.

They did not know where they were going. It did not matter to them where they were going. They did not look about them as they marched. They did not look before them, nor behind them. They did not look up at the cloudless sky, nor did they wonder where the clouds had gone. They did not remember the beautiful clouds of the morning that had sailed serenely over the enemy's country. They did not remember the sympathy of the town, nor the complacency of that fine little group of officers, nor the glittering of the bright medals, nor the insolence of the white woman who watched. They did not very much remember the grandeur of the General, nor the pride they had known in the General. They remembered their homes. The sweat ran down their faces under their helmets. Their feet were heavy on the road. They marched steadily, jolting along, patient, weary animals who remembered.

There was no sign of horror upon the earth. There was not a cloud in the sky. The afternoon sunlight was golden over the land. The regiment passed like a shadow through the bright country and was lost to view.

## **IN THE OPERATING ROOM**

THE operating room is the section of a wooden shed. Thin partitions separate it from the X-ray room on one side, and the sterilizing room on the other. Another door communicates with a corridor. There are three wounded men on three operating tables. Surgeons, nurses and orderlies are working over them. The doors keep opening and shutting. The boiler is pounding and bubbling in the sterilizing room. There is a noise of steam escaping, of feet hurrying down

the corridor, of ambulances rolling past the windows, and behind all this, the rhythmic pounding of the guns bombarding at a distance of ten miles or so.

1st Patient: Mother of God! Mother of God!

2nd Patient: Softly. Softly, You hurt me. Ah! You are hurting me.

3rd Patient: I am thirsty.

1st Surgeon: Cut the dressing, Mademoiselle.

2nd Surgeon: What's his ticket say? Show it to me. What's the X-ray show?

3rd Surgeon: Abdomen. Bad pulse. I wonder now?

1st Patient: In the name of God be careful. I suffer. I suffer.

1st Surgeon: At what time were you wounded?

1st Patient: At five this morning.

1st Surgeon: Where?

1st Patient: In the arm.

1st Surgeon: Yes, yes, but in what sector?

1st Patient: In the trenches near Besanghe.

1st Surgeon: Shell or bullet?

1st Patient: Shell. Merciful God, what are you doing?

A nurse comes in from the corridor. Her apron is splashed with blood.

Nurse: There's a lung just come in. Haemorrhage. Can one of you take him?

1st Surgeon: In a few minutes. In five minutes. Now then, Mademoiselle, strap down that other arm tighter.

Nurse (in doorway) to 2nd Surgeon: There's a knee for you, doctor, and three elbows. In five minutes I'll send in the lung. (Exit.)

3rd Patient: I'm thirsty. A drink. Give me a drink.

3rd Surgeon: In a little while. You must wait a little.

2nd Patient: Mother of Jesus, not like that. Don't turn my foot like that. Not that way. Take care. Great God, take care! I can't bear it. I tell you, I can't bear it!

2nd Surgeon: There, there, don't excite yourself. You've got a nasty leg, very nasty. Smells bad. Mademoiselle, hold his leg up. It's not pretty at all, this leg.

2nd Patient: Ah, doctor, doctor. What are you doing? Aiee !

2nd Surgeon: Be quiet. Don't move. Don't touch the wound I tell you. Idiot! Hold his leg. Keep your hands off, you animal. Hold his leg higher. Strap his hands down.

3rd Patient (feebly): I am thirsty. I die of thirst. A drink! A drink!

2nd Patient (screaming): You're killing me. Killing me! I'll die of it! Aieeeee!

3rd Patient (softly): I am thirsty. For pity a drink.

3rd Surgeon: Have you vomited blood, old man?

3rd Patient: I don't know. A drink please, doctor.

3rd Surgeon: Does it hurt here?

3rd Patient: No, I don't think so. A drink, sister, in pity's name, a drink.

Nurse: I can't give you a drink. It would hurt you. You are wounded in the stomach.

3rd Patient: So thirsty. Just a little drink. Just a drop. Sister for pity, just a drop.

3rd Surgeon: Moisten his lips. How long ago were you wounded?

3rd Patient: I don't know. In the night. Some night.

3rd Surgeon: Last night?

3rd Patient: Perhaps last night. I don't know. I lay in the mud a long time. Please sister a drink. Just a little drink.

1st Patient: What's in that bottle? What are you doing to me?

1st Surgeon: Keep still I tell you.

1st Patient: It burns! It's burning me! No more. No more! I beg of you, doctor; I can't bear any more!

1st Surgeon: Nonsense. This won't last a minute. There's nothing the matter with you. Your wounds are nothing.

1st Patient: You say it's nothing. My God, what are you doing now? Ai-ee!

1st Surgeon: It's got to be cleaned out. There's a piece of shell, bits of coat, all manner of dirt in it.

2nd Patient: Jeanne, petite Marie, Jean, where are you? Little Jean, where are you?

2nd Surgeon: Your leg is not at all pretty, my friend. We shall have to take it off.

2nd Patient: Oh, my poor wife! I have three children, doctor, If you take my leg off what will become of them and of the farm? Great God, to suffer like this!

2nd Surgeon to 1st Surgeon: Look here a moment. It smells bad. Gangrenous. What do you think?

1st Surgeon: No good waiting.

2nd Surgeon: Well, my friend, will you have it off?

2nd Patient: If you say so, doctor: Oh, my poor wife, my poor Jeanne. What will become of you? The children are too little to work in the fields.

2nd Surgeon (to nurse): Begin with the chloroform. We're going to put you to sleep, old man. Breathe deep. Breathe through the mouth. Is my saw there? Where is my amputating saw? Who's got my saw?

3rd Patient (softly): A drink, a drink. Give me a drink.

3rd Surgeon: I can do nothing with a pulse like that. Give him serum, five hundred c.c.s and camphorated oil and strychnine. Warm him up a bit.

Door opens, nurse enters, followed by two stretcher bearers.

Nurse: Here's the lung. Are you ready for it?

1st Surgeon: In a minute. One minute. Leave him there.

The stretcher bearers put their stretcher on the floor and go out.

2nd Patient: (half under chloroform): Aha! Aha! Ahead there, you son of a ----- . Forward! Forward! What a stink! I've got him! Now I've got you. Quick, quick! Let me go! Let me go! Jeannette, quick, quick, Jeannette! I'm coming. Marie? Little Jean, where are you?

2nd Surgeon: Tighten those straps. He's strong, poor devil.

1st Patient: Is it finished?

1st Surgeon: Very nearly. Keep quite still. Now then, the dressings mademoiselle. There you are old man. Don't bandage the arm too tight, mademoiselle. Get him out now. Hi, stretcher bearers, lift up that one from the floor, will you?

3rd Surgeon: It's no use operating. Almost no pulse.

3rd Patient: For pity a drink!

3rd Surgeon: Give him a drink. It won't matter. I can do nothing.

2nd Surgeon: I shall have to amputate above the knee. Is he under?

Nurse: Almost.

3rd Patient: For pity a drink.

Nurse: There, don't lift your head; here is a drink. Drink this.

3rd Patient: It is good. Thank you, sister.

1st Surgeon: Take this man to Ward 3. Now then, mademoiselle, cut the dressings.

3rd Surgeon: I can do nothing here. Send me the next one.

3rd Patient: I cannot see. I cannot see any more. Sister, where are you?

1st Surgeon: How's your spine case of yesterday?

3rd Surgeon: Just what you would expect---paralysed from the waist down.

1st Surgeon: They say the attack is for five in the morning.

3rd Surgeon: Orders are to evacuate every possible bed to-day.

3rd Patient: It is dark. Are you there, sister?

Nurse: Yes, old man, I'm here. Shall I send for a priest, doctor?

3rd Surgeon: Too late. Poor devil. It's hopeless when they come in like that, after lying for hours in the mud. There, it's finished. Call the stretcher bearers.

1st Surgeon: Quick, a basin! God! how the blood spouts. Quick, quick, quick! Three holes in this lung.

2nd Surgeon: Take that leg away, will you? There's no room to move here.

3rd Surgeon: Take this dead man away, and bring the next abdomen. Wipe that table, mademoiselle, while I wash my hands. And you, there, mop up the floor a bit.

The doors open and shut. Stretcher bearers go out and come in. A nurse comes from the sterilizing room with a pile of nickel drums in her arms. Another nurse goes out with trays of knives and other instruments. The nurse from the corridor comes back. An officer appears at the window.

Nurse: Three knees have come in, two more abdomens, five heads.

Officer (through the window): The Médecin Inspecteur will be here in half an hour. The General is coming at two to decorate all amputés.

1st Surgeon: We'll get no lunch to-day, and I'm hungry. There, I call that a very neat amputation.

2nd Surgeon: Three holes stopped in this lung in three minutes by the clock. Pretty quick, eh?

3rd Surgeon: Give me a light, some one. My experience is that if abdomens have to wait more than six hours it's no good. You can't do anything. I hope that chap got the oysters in Amiens! Oysters sound good to me.

## **BLIND**

THE door at the end of the baraque kept opening and shutting to let in the stretcher bearers. As soon as it opened a crack the wind scurried in and came hopping toward me across the bodies of the men that covered the floor, nosing under the blankets, lifting the flaps of heavy coats, and burrowing among the loose heaps of clothing and soiled bandages. Then the grizzled head of a stretcher bearer would appear, butting its way in, and he would emerge out of the black storm into the bright fog that seemed to fill the place, dragging the stretcher after him, and then the old one at the other end of the load would follow, and they would come slowly down the centre of the hut looking for a clear place on the floor.

The men were laid out in three rows on either side of the central alley way. It was a big hut, and there were about sixty stretchers in each row. There was space between the heads of one row and the feet of another row, but no space to pass between the stretchers in the same row; they touched. The old territorials who worked with me passed up and down between the heads and feet. I had a squad of thirty of these old orderlies and two sergeants and two priests, who were expert dressers. Wooden screens screened off the end of the hut opposite the entrance. Behind these were the two dressing tables where the priests dressed the wounds of the new arrivals

and got them ready for the surgeons, after the old men had undressed them and washed their feet. In one corner was my kitchen where I kept all my syringes and hypodermic needles and stimulants.

It was just before midnight when the stretcher bearers brought in the blind man, and there was no space on the floor anywhere; so they stood waiting, not knowing what to do with him.

I said from the floor in the second row: "Just a minute, old ones. You can put him here in a minute." So they waited with the blind man suspended in the bright, hot, misty air between them, like a pair of old horses in shafts with their heads down, while the little boy who had been crying for his mother died with his head on my breast. Perhaps he thought the arms holding him when he jerked back and died belonged to some woman I had never seen, some woman waiting somewhere for news of him in some village, somewhere in France. How many women, I wondered, were waiting out there in the distance for news of these men who were lying on the floor? But I stopped thinking about this the minute the boy was dead. It didn't do to think. I didn't as a rule, but the boy's very young voice had startled me. It had come through to me as a real voice will sound sometimes through a dream, almost waking you, but now it had stopped, and the dream was thick round me again, and I laid him down, covered his face with the brown blanket and called two other old ones.

"Put this one in the corridor to make more room here," I said; and I saw them lift him up. When they had taken him away, the stretcher bearers who had been waiting brought the blind one and put him down in the cleared space. They had to come round to the end of the front row and down between the row of feet and row of heads; they had to be very careful where they stepped; they had to lower the stretcher cautiously so as not to jostle the men on either side (there was just room), but these paid no attention. None of the men lying packed together on the floor noticed each other in this curious dreamplace.

I had watched this out of the corner of my eye, busy with something that was not very like a man. The limbs seemed to be held together only by the strong stuff of the uniform. The head was unrecognisable. It was a monstrous thing, and a dreadful rattling sound came from it. I looked up and saw the chief surgeon standing over me. I don't know how he got there. His small shrunken face was wet and white; his eyes were brilliant and feverish; his incredible hands that saved so many men so exquisitely, so quickly, were in the pockets of his white coat.

"Give him morphine," he said, "a double dose. As much as you like." He pulled a cigarette out of his pocket. "In cases like this, if I am not about, give morphine; enough, you understand." Then he vanished like a ghost. He went back to his operating room, a small white figure with round shoulders, a magician, who performed miracles with knives. He went away through the dream.

I gave the morphine, then crawled over and looked at the blind man's ticket. I did not know, of course, that he was blind until I read his ticket. A large round white helmet covered the top half of his head and face; only his nostrils and mouth and chin were uncovered. The surgeon in the dressing station behind the trenches had written on his ticket, "Shot through the eyes. Blind."

Did he know? I asked myself. No, he couldn't know yet. He would still be wondering, waiting, hoping, down there in that deep, dark silence of his, in his own dark personal world. He didn't know he was blind; no one would have told him. I felt his pulse. It was strong and steady. He was a long, thin man, but his body was not very cold and the pale lower half of his clear-cut face

was not very pale. There was something beautiful about him. In his case there was no hurry, no necessity to rush him through to the operating room. There was plenty of time. He would always be blind.

One of the orderlies was going up and down with hot tea in a bucket. I beckoned to him.

I said to the blind one: "Here is a drink." He didn't hear me, so I said it more loudly against the bandage, and helped him lift his head, and held the tin cup to his mouth below the thick edge of the bandage. I did not think then of what was hidden under the bandage. I think of it now. Another head case across the hut had thrown off his blanket and risen from his stretcher. He was standing stark naked except for his head bandage, in the middle of the hut, and was haranguing the crowd in a loud voice with the gestures of a political orator. But the crowd, lying on the floor, paid no attention to him. They did not notice him. I called to Gustave and Pierre to go to him.

The blind man said to me: "Thank you, sister, you are very kind. That is good. I thank you." He had a beautiful, voice. I noticed the great courtesy of his speech. But they were all courteous. Their courtesy when they died, their reluctance to cause me any trouble by dying or suffering, was one of the things it didn't do to think about.

Then I left him, and presently forgot that he was there waiting in the second row of stretchers on the left side of the long crowded floor.

Gustave and Pierre had got the naked orator back on to his stretcher and were wrapping him up again in his blankets. I let them deal with him and went back to my kitchen at the other end of the hut, where my syringes and hypodermic needles were boiling in saucepans. I had received by post that same morning a dozen beautiful new platinum needles. I was very pleased with them. I said to one of the dressers as I fixed a needle on my syringe and held it up, squirting the liquid through it; "Look. I've some lovely new needles." He said: "Come and help me a moment. Just cut this bandage, please." I went over to his dressing-table. He darted off to a voice that was shrieking somewhere. There was a man stretched on the table. His brain came off in my hands when I lifted the bandage from his head.

When the dresser came back I said: "His brain came off on the bandage."

"Where have you put it?" "I put it in the pail under the table."

"It's only one half of his brain," he said, looking into the man's skull. "The rest is here."

I left him to finish the dressing and went about my own business. I had much to do.

It was my business to sort out the wounded as they were brought in from the ambulances and to keep them from dying before they got to the operating rooms: it was my business to sort out the nearly dying from the dying. I was there to sort them out and tell how fast life was ebbing in them. Life was leaking away from all of them; but with some there was no hurry, with others it was a case of minutes. It was my business to create a counter-wave of life, to create the flow against the ebb. It was like a tug of war with the tide. The ebb of life was cold. When life was ebbing the man was cold; when it began to flow back, he grew warm. It was all, you see, like a dream. The dying men on the floor were drowned men cast up on the beach, and there was the ebb of life pouring away over them, sucking them away, an invisible tide; and my old orderlies, like old sea-salts out of a lifeboat, were working to save them. I had to watch, to see if they

were slipping, being dragged away. If a man were slipping quickly, being sucked down rapidly, I sent runners to the operating rooms. There were six operating rooms on either side of my hut. Medical students in white coats hurried back and forth along the covered corridors between us. It was my business to know which of the wounded could wait and which could not. I had to decide for myself. There was no one to tell me. If I made any mistakes, some would die on their stretchers on the floor under my eyes who need not have died. I didn't worry. I didn't think. I was too busy, too absorbed in what I was doing. I had to judge from what was written on their tickets and from the way they looked and the way they felt to my hand. My hand could tell of itself one kind of cold from another. They were all half-frozen when they arrived, but the chill of their icy flesh wasn't the same as the cold inside them when life was almost ebbed away. My hands could instantly tell the difference between the cold of the harsh bitter night and the stealthy cold of death. Then there was another thing, a small fluttering thing. I didn't think about it or count it. My fingers felt it. I was in a dream, led this way and that by my cute eyes and hands that did many things, and seemed to know what to do.

Sometimes there was no time to read the ticket or touch the pulse. The door kept opening and shutting to let in the stretcherbearers whatever I was doing. I could not watch when I was giving piques; but, standing by my table filling a syringe, I could look down over the rough forms that covered the floor and pick out at a distance this one and that one. I had been doing this for two years, and had learned to read the signs. I could tell from the way they twitched, from the peculiar shade of a pallid face, from the look of tight pinched-in nostrils, and in other ways which I could not have explained, that this or that one was slipping over the edge of the beach of life. Then I would go quickly with my long saline needles, or short thick camphor oil needles, and send one of the old ones hurrying along the corridor to the operating rooms. But sometimes there was no need to hurry; sometimes I was too late; with some there was no longer any question of the ebb and flow of life and death; there was nothing to do.

The hospital throbbed and hummed that night like a dynamo. The operating rooms were ablaze; twelve surgical équipes were at work; boilers steamed and whistled; nurses hurried in and out of the sterilizing rooms carrying big shining metal boxes and enamelled trays; feet were running, slower feet. shuffling. The hospital was going full steam ahead. I had a sense of great power, exhilaration and excitement. A loud wind was howling. It was throwing itself like a pack of wolves against the flimsy wooden walls, and the guns were growling. Their voices were dying away. I thought of them as a pack of beaten dogs, slinking away across the dark waste where the dead were lying and the wounded who had not yet been picked up, their only cover the windy blanket of the bitter November night.

And I was happy. It seemed to me that the crazy crowded bright hot shelter was a beautiful place. I thought, "This is the second battlefield. The battle now is going on over the helpless bodies of these men. It is we who are doing the fighting now, with their real enemies." And I thought of the chief surgeon, the wizard working like lightning through the night, and all the others wielding their flashing knives against the invisible enemy. The wounded had begun to arrive at noon. It was now past midnight, and the door kept opening and shutting to let in the stretcher-bearers, and the ambulances kept lurching in at the gate. Lanterns were moving through the windy dark from shed to shed. The nurses were out there in the scattered huts, putting the men to bed when they came over the dark ground, asleep, from the operating rooms. They would wake up in clean warm beds---those who did wake up.

"We will send you the dying, the desperate, the moribund," the Inspector-General had said. "You must expect a thirty per cent. mortality." So we had got ready for it; we had organised to dispute that figure.

We had built brick ovens, four of them, down the centre of the hut, and on top of these, galvanised iron cauldrons of boiling water were steaming. We had driven nails all the way down the wooden posts that held up the roof and festooned the posts with red rubber hot-water bottles. In the corner near to my kitchen we had partitioned off a cubicle, where we built a light bed, a rough wooden frame lined with electric light bulbs, where a man could be cooked back to life again. My own kitchen was an arrangement of shelves for saucepans and syringes and needles of different sizes, and cardboard boxes full of ampoules of camphor oil and strychnine and caffeine and morphine, and large ampoules of sterilized salt and water, and dozens of beautiful sharp shining needles were always on the boil.

It wasn't much to look at, this reception hut. It was about as attractive as a goods yard in a railway station, but we were very proud of it, my old ones and I. We had got it ready, and it was good enough for us. We could revive the cold dead there; snatch back the men who were slipping over the edge; hoist them out of the dark abyss into life again. And because our mortality at the end of three months was only nineteen per cent., not thirty, well it was the most beautiful place in the world to me and my old grizzled Pèpères, Gaston and Pierre and Leroux and the others were to me like shining archangels. But I didn't think about this. I think of it now. I only knew it then, and was happy. Yes, I was happy there.

Looking back, I do not understand that woman---myself---standing in that confused goods yard filled with bundles of broken human flesh. The place by one o'clock in the morning was a shambles. The air was thick with steaming sweat, with the effluvia of mud, dirt, blood. The men lay in their stiff uniforms that were caked with mud and dried blood, their great boots on their feet; stained bandages showing where a trouser leg or a sleeve had been cut away. Their faces gleamed faintly, with a faint phosphorescence. Some who could not breathe lying down were propped up on their stretchers against the wall, but most were prone on their backs, staring at the steep iron roof.

The old orderlies moved from one stretcher to another, carefully, among the piles of clothing, boots and blood-soaked bandages---careful not to step on a hand or a sprawling twisted foot. They carried zinc pails of hot water and slabs of yellow soap and scrubbing brushes. They gathered up the heaps of clothing, and made little bundles of the small things out of pockets, or knelt humbly, washing the big yellow stinking feet that protruded from under the brown blankets. It was the business of these old ones to undress the wounded, wash them, wrap them in blankets, and put hot-water bottles at their feet and sides. It was a difficult business peeling the stiff uniform from a man whose hip or shoulder was fractured, but the old ones were careful. Their big peasant hands were gentle---very, very gentle and careful. They handled the wounded men as if they were children. Now, looking back, I see their rough powerful visages, their shaggy eye-brows, their big clumsy, gentle hands. I see them go down on their stiff knees; I hear their shuffling feet and their soft gruff voices answering the voices of the wounded, who are calling to them for drinks, or to God for mercy.

The old ones had orders from the commandant not to cut the good cloth of the uniforms if they could help it, but they had orders from me not to hurt the men, and they obeyed me. They slit

up the heavy trousers and slashed across the stiff tunics with long scissors, and pulled very slowly, very carefully at the heavy boots, and the wounded men did not groan or cry out very much. They were mostly very quiet. When they did cry out they usually apologised for the annoyance of their agony. Only now and then a wind of pain would sweep over the floor, tossing the legs and arms, then subside again.

I think that woman, myself, must have been in a trance, or under some horrid spell. Her feet are lumps of fire, her face is clammy, her apron is splashed with blood; but she moves ceaselessly about with bright burning eyes and handles the dreadful wreckage of men as if in a dream. She does not seem to notice the wounds or the blood. Her eyes seem to be watching something that comes and goes and darts in and out among the prone bodies. Her eyes and her hands and her ears are alert, intent on the unseen thing that scurries and hides and jumps out of the corner on to the face of a man when she's not looking. But quick, something makes her turn. Quick, she is over there, on her knees fighting the thing off, driving it away, and now it's got another victim. It's like a dreadful game of hide and seek among the wounded. All her faculties are intent on it. The other things that are going on, she deals with automatically.

There is a constant coming and going. Medical students run in and out.

"What have you got ready?"

"I've got three knees, two spines, five abdomens, twelve heads. Here's a lung case-- haemorrhage. He can't wait." She is binding the man's chest; she doesn't look up.

"Send him along."

"Pierre ! Gaston ! Call the stretcherbearers to take the lung to Monsieur D-----." She fastens the tight bandage, tucks the blanket quickly round the thin shoulders. The old men lift him. She hurries back to her saucepans to get a new needle.

A surgeon appears.

"Where's that knee of mine? I left it in the saucepan on the window ledge. I had boiled it up for an experiment."

"One of the orderlies must have taken it," she says, putting her old needle on to boil.

"Good God! Did he mistake it?"

"Jean, did you take a saucepan you found on the windowsill?"

"Yes, sister, I took it. I thought it was for the casse croûte; it looked like a ragout of mouton. I have it here."

"Well, it was lucky he didn't eat it. It was a knee I had cut out, you know."

It is time for the old ones' "casse croûte." It is after one o'clock. At one o'clock the orderlies have cups of coffee and chunks of bread and meat. They eat their supper gathered round the stoves where the iron cauldrons are boiling. The surgeons and the sisters attached to the operating rooms are drinking coffee too in the sterilizing rooms. I do not want any supper. I am not hungry. I am not tired. I am busy. My eyes are busy and my fingers. I am conscious of nothing about myself but my eyes, hands and feet. My feet are a nuisance, they are, swollen, hurting lumps, but my fingers are perfectly satisfactory. They are expert in the handling of frail

glass ampoules and syringes and needles. I go from one man to another jabbing the sharp needles into their sides, rubbing their skins with iodine, and each time I pick my way back across their bodies to fetch a fresh needle I scan the surface of the floor where the men are spread like a carpet, for signs, for my special secret signals of death.

"Aha! I'll catch you out again." Quick, to that one. That jerking! That sudden livid hue spreading over his form. "Quick, Emile! Pierre!" I have lifted the blanket. The blood is pouring out on the floor under the stretcher. "Get the tourniquet. Hold his leg up. Now then, tight-tighter. Now call the stretcher bearers."

Someone near is having a fit. Is it epilepsy? I don't know. His mouth is frothy. His eyes are rolling. He tries to fling himself on the floor. He falls with a thud across his neighbour, who does not notice. The man just beyond propped up against the wall, watches as if from a great distance. He has a gentle patient face; this spectacle does not concern him.

The door keeps opening and shutting to let in the stretcher-bearers. The wounded are carried in at the end door and are carried out to the operating rooms at either side. The sergeant is counting the treasures out of a dead man's pockets. He is tying his little things, his letters and briquet, etc., up in a handkerchief. Some of the old ones are munching their bread and meat in the centre of the hut under the electric light. The others are busy with their pails and scissors. They shuffle about, kneeling, scrubbing, filling hotwater bottles. I see it all through a mist. It is misty but eternal. It is a scene in eternity, in some strange dream-hell where I am glad to be employed, where I belong, where I am happy. How crowded together we are here. How close we are in this nightmare. The wounded are packed into this place like sardines, and we are so close to them, my old ones and I. I've never been so close before to human beings. We are locked together, the old ones and I, and the wounded men; we are bound together. We all feel it. We all know it. The same thing is throbbing in us, the single thing, the one life. We are one body, suffering and bleeding. It is a kind of bliss to me to feel this. I am a little delirious, but my head is cool enough, it seems to me.

"No, not that one. He can wait. Take the next one to Monsieur D-----, and this one to Monsieur Guy, and this one to Monsieur Robert. We will put this one on the electric light bed; he has no pulse. More hot-water bottles here, Gaston.

"Do you feel cold, mon vieux?"

"Yes, I think so, but pray do not trouble."

I go with him into the little cubicle, turn on the light bulbs, leave him to cook there; and as I come out again to face the strange heaving dream, I suddenly hear a voice calling me, a new far-away hollow voice.

"Sister! My sister! Where are you?"

I am startled. It sounds so far away, so hollow and so sweet. It sounds like a bell high up in the mountains. I do not know where it comes from. I look down over the rows of men lying on their backs, one close to the other, packed together on the floor, and I cannot tell where the voice comes from. Then I hear it again.

"Sister! Oh, my sister, where are you?"

A lost voice. The voice of a lost man, wandering in the mountains, in the night. It is the blind man calling. I had forgotten him. I had forgotten that he was there. He could wait. The others could not wait. So I had left him and forgotten him.

Something in his voice made me run, made my heart miss a beat. I ran down the centre alley way, round and up again, between the two rows, quickly, carefully stepping across to him over the stretchers that separated us. He was in the second row. I could just squeeze through to him.

"I am coming," I called to him. "I am coming."

I knelt beside him. "I am here," I said; but he lay quite still on his back; he didn't move at all; he hadn't heard me. So I took his hand and put my mouth close to his bandaged head and called to him with desperate entreaty.

"I am here. What is it? What is the matter?"

He didn't move even then, but he gave a long shuddering sigh of relief.

"I thought I had been abandoned here, all alone," he said softly in his far-away voice. I seemed to awake then. I looked round me and began to tremble, as one would tremble if one awoke with one's head over the edge of a precipice. I saw the wounded packed round us, hemming us in. I saw his comrades, thick round him, and the old ones shuffling about, working and munching their hunks of bread, and the door opening to let in the stretcher bearers. The light poured down on the rows of faces. They gleamed faintly. Four hundred faces were staring up at the roof, side by side. The blind man didn't know. He thought he was alone, out in the dark. That was the precipice, that reality.

"You are not alone," I lied. "There are many of your comrades here, and I am here, and there are doctors and nurses. You are with friends here, not alone."

"I thought," he murmured in that far-away voice, "that you had gone away and forgotten me, and that I was abandoned here alone."

My body rattled and jerked like a machine out of order. I was awake now, and I seemed to be breaking to pieces.

"No," I managed to lie again. "I had not forgotten you, nor left you alone." And I looked down again at the visible half of his face and saw that his lips were smiling.

At that I fled from him. I ran down the long, dreadful hut and hid behind my screen and cowered, sobbing, in a corner, hiding my face. The old ones were very troubled. They didn't know what to do. Presently I heard them whispering:

"She is tired," one said.

"Yes, she is tired."

"She should go off to bed," another said.

"We will manage somehow without her," they said.

Then one of them timidly stuck a grizzled head round the corner of the screen. He held his tin cup in his hands. It was full of hot coffee. He held it out, offering it to me. He didn't know of anything else that he could do for me.