The 'Correspondence' Affair

by Avirra

Summary

Covering the years from 1912 to 1918, letters to/from Alexander Waverly and Millicent Kildare - to one another as well as to others. Letters begin shortly after the end of The 'Avignon' Affair.
1912 - May thru June

From: Thun, Switzerland

May 1, 1912

Dearest Alexander,

I am settling well into the routine here. I wonder how my mother came across this place – it is certainly not among the better known schools in the region and quite small compared to the others, I have learned. It is not at all what I had expected. Which, considering my mother, I shouldn't be that surprised.

My first week seemed to consist mainly of the instructors testing my current range of knowledge and then setting my lessons from there. German and Italian are in my study course now with minor studies in English and French to keep those language skills up. Alas, they have no Russian instructor, so I am on my own there.

The more physical courses will go by the season. Skiing is confined to winter and swimming to summer, naturally. Hunting skills are also taught, including both guns and archery. I hadn't really thought of those as social skills, but considering the number of parties held during hunting season, I suppose they are. Those that don't care to learn how to actually hit a target are being instructed on how to at least avoid inflicting wounds on the other members of the hunting party. A handy thing to know if one ever intends to be invited a second time, I would suppose.

The other courses are mainly in mathematics and science, though there are also classes in various stages of cooking and sewing. Those latter courses seem as much lessons on making sure you aren't being robbed blind by paying for foods you aren't eating or for a quality of seamstress work that isn't being provided. I suppose there is value in learning the difference between a well-sewn seam and a poorly done one.

There is actually more in the way of actual studies and less in the way of etiquette studies than I had imagined, another of the pleasant surprises. The etiquette part seems to be more small rules and reminders as we go through our day instead of classes dedicated to it. For one thing, everyone is limited to three pieces of jewelry during our instruction periods. Not what I would have considered a large deprivation but it seems to be daunting to some to hold themselves to that count - one of the young ladies was trying to get the rule altered (at least for herself) to no more than three pieces of each type of jewelry - allowing three rings, three bracelets, etc. Until I met her, I had always thought the phrase 'dripping with jewels' to be a fancy. However, she does somehow manage that feat when she has free rein to wear as much as she pleases. The instructors do make note of discrepancies even if they don't appear to be looking at the young lady in question. Attention to detail seems to be a staffing requirement here.

Even the short amount of time I have been here has made me more appreciative of the way my mother reared me and introduced me to the world. A few of the girls here have been raised as if they were some exotic housecat – pampered, petted and ignorant as a newborn child in even the most basic ways of the world. Some of them are doing without a personal maid for the first time in their lives. How any person of reasonable mental ability can attain the age of ten without the ability to be able to dress themselves self boggles my mind.

I do not think they would have fared well if they had been called upon to camp underneath a wagon. I do not know that they would even fare well if they had to sleep on a couch instead of a bed. And,
heaven help me, if I ever succumb to the fits of giggles that some of them are prone to do, I believe I will throw myself from a balcony before my mental state is further compromised.

Fortunately, there are some sensible types around, but we are outnumbered by a goodly margin. I would have to guess there are at least two gigglers for each sensible seeming girl. I suppose I should just count it a blessing that the instructors do not allow giggling in the classroom. I would end up throttling or visiting some other form of violence on at least one of the gigglers otherwise.

I trust you arrived back in England safely and hope that there have not been any repercussions against you for all of the assistance you provided me in a time of need. For which I do not begin to know how to adequately thank you.

Yours with fond regards,

Millicent

From : London, England
May 25, 1912

Dear Millicent,

Your letter and I have finally caught up to one another. First, may I say that you have already expressed your thanks most abundantly and certainly need not worry about continuing to do so. It was my honor and pleasure to have been able to render such aid as I was able.

I did indeed make it back to London in good health, but was almost immediately requested to undertake an assignment that required my presence away from my flat for the better part of two weeks. I am no longer with the Foreign Office. At the moment, they are undergoing reorganization.

The portion of my assignment that I can mention now had to do with being one of the liaisons present on May 13 at the signing of the royal warrant by King George that has officially added the Royal Flying Corp to Great Britain's military forces. I heard His Lordship mention his belief that we are entering a time of great changes and that he rather envied the two of us for the amount of changes that we are likely to witness during our lifetimes.

I suppose it is a two-edged sword that the world is becoming a smaller place with the advent of air travel. New ways to accomplish goals of travel and peace always add up as well to new ways to wage war.

In looking back over what I have already written, I cannot help but think that this is probably not an appropriate letter to be sending a twelve-year old young lady, but I have as limited an amount of dealing with twelve year olds as you said that you had yourself. And I fear that if I begin to censor myself, you will receive letters with nothing but remarks regarding the current weather - which would be bound to be as dull to read as it would be to write.

Speaking of other young ladies, do try to refrain from practicing violence on the gigglers. Patience in dealing with them will likely be a valuable asset later in life. Despite the advances in education, you are bound to run into any number of that type even after leaving the boundaries of the school. And, as you have already noted, in many situations, we are outnumbered by them. While we need not emulate them, neither do we need to eradicate them as they may serve some higher purpose that isn't readily apparent. I suppose that if nothing else, they stimulate the economy by constantly redefining what is and is not fashionable.
As a side note, please also try to refrain from flinging yourself from balconies. Any bout of giggles that might break out from you would be more likely due to something striking you as being uncommonly silly rather than any sign of mental weakness on your part.

Do let me know if this sort of letter is wholly unacceptable and I will try to adjust to a more suitable style.

Yours truly,

Alexander

From: Thun, Switzerland

June 15, 1912

Dearest Alexander,

I shall begin by saying that there is absolutely nothing wrong with the way you write a letter. I won't guarantee that I shall be interested in every subject that you cover, but I am interested in what interests you. Reading back over that last sentence, let me assure you that it made a great deal more sense in my head than it seems to make on paper.

It has been quite the busy time here as yesterday morning was graduation day for the eldest students among us. Seventeen in all. Those of us in the lower classes rather filled in spots in the ceremonies – ushering guests to their seats, giving directions to the hopelessly lost, passing out programs and other things of that nature. There are no formal studies during graduation week, but it was tiring. It seems we helped scrub and decorate everything from cellar to ceiling. I am grateful today is Saturday. After I finish posting my letter to you, I plan to take a book that one of my instructors recommended – *Le Fantome de l'Opera* – and finding a nice tree to sit in the shade of while reading it.

Do let me know anything you happen upon while reading. Or even better, tell me about anything you see at the theatre. I suppose that it one thing that I am discovering I miss. I used to go to the theatre once a week, whether to listen to music or see plays. We put on plays here, but it is hardly the same thing. Especially if you can wrap your mind around someone of my size playing the role of Romeo in a Shakespeare production. I am trying not to feel ridiculous, but my Juliet is a good three inches taller than I am and I would be willing to wager that she outweighs me by at least two stone. Thank heavens the script doesn't call for me carrying her about or my death scene would come far earlier than scheduled in the play.

I am beginning to feel like I am making some advances in my language studies, though I find I have problems with each of them. With German, the words are coming along well enough, but my accent is atrocious. And while I can get the rhythm of the Italian language well enough, getting the actual words right is a stumbling block. Perhaps it would be easier if I were tackling them one at a time, but that is not how things are done here and I shall simply have to trudge on. My instructors seem highly amused by my impatience. Well, perhaps they do have a point. It isn't as if I have been studying the languages for years, after all, and six weeks really isn't a great deal of time. I suppose the problem is that I really cannot recall formally learning any other language. I've had English, French and Russian all spoken to me for as long as I can remember.

So the military now has a force in the air as well. Imagine that. The school is still all abuzz about the young American woman that flew across the English Channel back while you and I were hiding in France. A Miss Harriet Quimby, aged twenty-four. It seems a touch peculiar that the first man across was French and the first woman across was American. Perhaps that is a sign that our own air
presence was overdue.

I suppose Uncle William is correct that things are changing. I only hope that not all progress goes the way of the poor RMS Titanic. Bigger does not always equate to better.

Speaking of which, you would not believe the amount of interest my mentioning being briefly on the Titanic generated. I was even asked to speak about it in front of an assembly. My History instructor refers to the incident as a romantic tragedy, much like a bride that perishes on her wedding night. That strikes me as a touch sad. Surely the tragedy of the number of those lost would be just as devastating had it been the Titanic’s fifteenth voyage instead of her first.

The sight of the sunshine through the window beckons me, so I will conclude this letter for now. If nothing else could be said for this location, the scent and feel of the air here is absolutely amazing.

Yours with fond regards,

Millicent
1912 - July thru December

From: London, England

July 10, 1912

My Dear Millicent,

I do not know that you would count it as theatre, but it did seem as such to me. His Lordship requested that I act as an escort for the daughter of a close friend of his who was scheduled to have her 'coming out' on the twenty-eighth of June. I, of course, agreed.

The young lady, Augustine, was very pleasant company. As a matter of fact, she and I attended the theatre together on the first of July. It was called the Royal Variety Performance and was held at the London Palace Theatre. It was a rather elaborate affair - understandably so since His Majesty King George and Her Majesty Queen Mary were both in attendance. I'm told that over three million rose petals were used in the decorations, though I cannot imagine that anyone actually bothered to count them all.

One of the performances that I believe you would have enjoyed greatly was that of Anna Pavlova. Her movements in *Le Cygne* were especially impressive, I thought - not that I am an expert in dance, of course. Augustine seemed to enjoy Fanny Fields performing 'The Happy Dutch Girl', but I cannot say that I cared a great deal for it myself. I've enclosed my copy of the night's program. Not all of the acts listed actually performed, though why they did not, I don't know the reason for.

Augustine and I will be attending a performance of 'The Dancing Viennese' at the Coliseum next week. Clara Dow is supposed to be appearing in it. I believe it was around four years ago that I had the pleasure of watching her in the role of Yum-Yum from 'The Mikado'. Have you ever attended any of the Gilbert and Sullivan productions, Millicent? Possibly not. Some of the material might be considered inappropriate for your age.

The word 'inappropriate' brings another topic to mind. There have been some rumbles about inappropriate and possibly even negligent behavior aboard the RMS Titanic. I have not heard a great deal in the way yet of details, but apparently some of the higher ranking crew of the ship departed on lifeboats while passengers still remained trapped onboard. If there is the slightest truth to any of that, there is bound to be an inquiry. I find it hard to believe that a British gentleman would be guilty of such a thing, yet the fact does remain that Mister Ismay, a high ranking man in the White Star Line, is alive while hundreds of others are dead beneath the waves.

On to happier topics, I am glad your language classes are going so well and must agree with your instructors that you are far too hard on yourself. I know some, who have studied French longer than you have been alive, that cannot speak it with the ease and fluency that you do. During our trip together, I don't recall a single soul ever questioning your guise as a native French girl. I do seem to recall a few questioning gazes my direction, but our being together seemed to allow my own diction to pass muster. As to the newer languages you are trying to master, German is not the kindest language to the ear, so perhaps part of the problem lies there. I have no doubt that you will conquer it as you seem to do any other thing once you've set your mind to it.

I wish I could be present to see your version of Romeo. I cannot help but think you will be able to do well despite the size difference between you and your Juliet. I do hope for your sake and sanity that she is not one of the gigglers lest you be tempted to strand her at the balcony.
Please do not get discouraged if time passes without a reply from me. There is a chance that I may be traveling on other assignments in the near future and that is likely to cause my postings to be irregular.

Yours truly,
Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland
July 28, 1912

Dear Alexander,

I was practically raised in the theatre. I daresay I have viewed many performances that might not be considered of appropriate age level, but I don't believe that I have been adversely affected by the exposure. Or perhaps the blame can be laid there for the streak of cynicism that the girls here say that I have.

As to the question, yes, I have seen several of Gilbert and Sullivan's works. Your friend should enjoy Miss Dow's performance. I saw her last in 'Patience' in the title role and she was delightful in it. I should like to meet Augustine some day. If she has just had her coming out, I presume she must be somewhere around five years older than I am. Perhaps she has an easier time with Italian conjugations and could make some suggestions.

We shall be performing our version of Romeo and Juliet next week. I've known the basic story for quite some time, of course, but until I had to study his role, I never quite realized how shallow Romeo is. Pining for the fair Rosaline as if his world is ending for the lack of her and then once she is out of sight, he falls for Juliet like Rosaline never existed. Had he delayed killing himself, he likely would have been equally in love with yet another woman before the month was out. I had heard the phrase 'out of sight, out of mind', but never really thought of it in those terms. I trust Romeo is an aberration among men. I certainly cannot picture either yourself or Uncle Lucien behaving in such a caddish way.

My Juliet is a young lady by the slightly unfortunate name of Ermengarde Breckenridge. She is, alas, a bit of a giggler, but to her credit, not a chronic one. The unfortunate part is that she has trouble saying any of Juliet's 'love' speeches without either turning red as a beet from blushing or giggling. We are being graded on this, so I can only hope to keep my own features composed and pray our Drama instructor grades us as individuals instead of as a whole. Of course, Ermengarde might surprise me and do perfectly well at the actual performance. The times that she has been able to get a line out without embarrassment or laughter, she did quite well. And she does at least have all of her lines memorized - which is more than I can say for the young lady who is playing Mercutio.

If you find yourself away from London for an extended time, do try to at least drop a postcard so that I shall not have to muse if you've been run over by a donkey cart in some foreign land. Has it really only been three months that I've been here? It seems so much longer somehow.

In the fine weather here, we have begun archery lessons. My primary difficulty is upper body strength, but I have been assured that a bit more practice will work all of that out. My instructor also assures me that I have a 'good eye'. That seems to mean that I have a knack for zeroing in on my target, so I suppose that will be an advantage. Our instructor has offered to show me how to throw a blade as well and I believe I will take her up on that as she says that will also help me sharpen my hand to eye coordination.
We won't begin our lessons on firearms until the fall. There is even a bit of talk that some of us might be allowed to participate in a local hunt if our skills are adequate. I think I will make that a goal. I am not sure that I will enjoy it, but difficult to say unless I give it a try.

I do appreciate the news on the Titanic. We do not have access to news on a regular basis here as some of the instructors feel that current events take our minds off of our basic studies. The oldest girls are the only ones with actual studies in current events. I suppose they only make that exception so that the poor things don't drop dead of shock when they step out into the real world.

Do give my Uncle William my best regards when next you see him and also tell him that I trust his hand will soon be healed. He will know what I mean.

With fond regards,

Millicent

From : London, England
August 3, 1912

My Dear Millicent,

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but I read in the news from the United States that the woman flyer that you wrote to me about, Miss Harriet Quimby, died in an airplane mishap last month. For reasons unknown, her plane pitched forward without warning and threw both herself and her passenger out of their seats. Both plunged to their deaths. In reading through her biography, she was a rather accomplished woman, having been a journalist, a theatre critic and author of several movie screenplays. It is a shame she is no longer with us. She sounds as if a conversation with her would have been fascinating.

Regarding your problems with Italian conjugations, I fear that Augustine would not be very much help. The only language she knows more than a smattering of is French and you know much more of it than she does. She did not seem to enjoy the performance by Miss Dow in ‘The Dancing Viennese’ either. It would seem her tastes and mine on what constitutes an enjoyable evening do not align well. She is a charming creature, but I doubt we will be seeing one another socially any longer except possibly in passing.

So your Juliet is Ermengarde Breckenridge? I don't know that I would describe her name as unfortunate, but it is a bit of a mouthful. How did your performance go? I suppose I can wait to get a report from His Lordship since I know he was intending to drop in to watch it for himself. That reminds me. I did pass along your message to him and he flushed. Which I gather was likely your intent.

I am not certain if news of the Summer Olympics counts as current events at your school and are therefore not covered, but Great Britain had a rather good showing. 10 gold, 15 silver and 16 bronze. That put our nation at third on the medal count, behind only the United States and Sweden - and, of course, Sweden had the home team advantage.

I've not heard any additional rumblings regarding the Titanic and rather get the feeling that the White Star Line is simply hoping people will forget about it. I doubt that will happen as it has quite captured the attention of the public and benefits are being held in many towns to aid the families who lost loved ones aboard the ill-fated vessel.

As for myself, I am currently clerking in one of the Whitehall offices and His Lordship seems to like
to make use of me as an aid on occasion. Your uncle is a very interesting man to watch in action, so I rather enjoy these excursions. I believe I am learning a great deal from being around him.

Before I forget, one thing that struck me in your last letter was the remark that some of your fellow students consider you to have a streak of cynicism. I must say that I never noticed that tendency in you myself. A bit of a realist perhaps, but not cynical. Perhaps it is simply their own lack of experience outside of the walls of home and school that make you appear that way in comparison. At any rate, I shouldn't worry myself about that if I were you.

Yours,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

August 20, 1912

Dearest Alexander,

I am so terribly sorry that I have delayed so long in writing back to you. Examinations are apparently given here twice a year. I arrived after the first examination period of the year, but the second period is the second week of August. After all of that work, I decided that I would await my results before writing.

I am judged above my age level in English and French language skills, literature, dramatics, penmanship and general deportment. I am at my age level in German and Italian language skills (which considering my abysmal accent, I can only assume that means they do not have high expectations for anyone my age). I need improvement on archery, sewing, cooking, general sciences and mathematics. The head mistress seems pleased with my marks since I have yet to be here a full year, but has expressed that I do need to keep my nose to the grindstone more. I wouldn't say it to her, but what sort of an expression is that? Who in their right mind would put their nose against a grindstone? Not even Lavinia Wilkinson would do that and her nose verges toward the enormous.

As you might judge from my marks in dramatics, 'Romeo and Juliet' came out rather well. Ermengarde did have an unfortunate bout of the giggles during the first flirtation scene, but she managed to make it fit somehow and she made Juliet seem a bit coquettish. I am not one to argue with results and am relieved that it is over. Well, over until our instructor assigns us the next play.

Uncle William did manage to make it over in time to view our production and was very kind in his reviews. He even managed to get the headmistress to allow myself and Ermengarde to leave the school for the evening. The restaurant he took us to served possibly the finest meal that I have eaten thus far in my life. Ermengarde seemed to enjoy everything as much as I did and managed to make it through the whole of the evening with only two brief giggles. I do believe that there is hope for her. She and I have become rather close over the course of working on the play. She is a year older than I am, but not quite as academically inclined, I fear. She does score much better in cooking and sewing than I do, so I suppose it is simply a case of differing talents. I am assisting her in fine points on her French and she is giving me pointers on the difference it can make if one holds a needle in a different fashion.

We were indeed allowed news of the Olympics. I found it very interesting that Japan joined in the games. That rather does make the event a world encompassing one now. I was saddened to hear of the death of Miss Quimby, but she died doing something that she had a passion for. I know my dear mother once said that she would have been happy if allowed to die while dancing. I only wish fate
had been as kind to her.

Yours always,

Millicent

From : London, England

September 9, 1912

My Dear Millicent,

To give you advance warning, I shall be departing in approximately two weeks for an assignment in the Persian Gulf region and am not likely to return from there until sometime in November. I will drop you a letter from that area if time permits, but I am unlikely to see any of your letters until my return. I will look forward to catching up on them on my return.

In theatre news, on the third of this month, I went to His Majesty's Theatre and saw a performance of 'Drake'. As you could probably guess, it is about Sir Francis Drake from Elizabethan times. Lyn Harding played the title role admirably. Lady Drake was portrayed charmingly by Amy Brandon-Thomas who I understand is the daughter of playwright Brandon Thomas. I recall seeing one of his plays, a bit of a far-fetched farce called Charley's Aunt. Far fetched, but quite amusing.

I was accompanied to 'Drake' by Evelyn Stagg, the sister of an old classmate of mine. A lovely young lady, but I fear she might well be the elder sister to one of your gigglers. She is a devoted follower of the theatre and apparently had thoughts of taking up the wig and paint herself at one point, much to her mother's dismay.

My mentor at the Ministry has hinted heavily that I should put serious effort into finding a suitable wife. Apparently there is only so far a man goes in the ranks as a bachelor as unmarried men are considered to be less serious. I suppose I can see that to a degree, but I cannot say that I am in any particular rush at this point in my life.

I must agree that the thought of holding one's nose to a grindstone would bring to mind pain more than conscientious work. There are any number of even stranger sayings in the world. The important part is that your head mistress is pleased with your overall progress. As to her admonition to apply yourself, what else could she say? That you're doing splendidly and can slack off? I daresay she wouldn't keep her position long if she took that tact.

As for your language studies, perhaps you can find a way to make your current studies more like your past ones. Find some that speak the languages fluently and ask that they speak them in your presence. If nothing else, the immersion with native speakers might help you get past the problems that you feel that you have in picking up the proper accents.

His Lordship was rather impressed by your school's production on Romeo and Juliet, though he did note that your Mercutio still didn't have all of her lines down. He did also mention that the pairing of you with Ermengarde was a bit odd on appearance, but carried off well regardless. Your Ermengarde must be one of those young ladies that bring out a fatherly feeling as His Lordship seemed to be quite concerned with her feelings.

I will sign off for now. Evelyn and I are dining tonight with her brother and his fiancé. They are planning to be wed around the Christmas season, I believe.

Yours,
Dearest Alexander,

I shall be looking forward to what you have to say about the Persian Gulf upon your return. It is an area of the world that I have never heard very much about. In the meantime, I shall be keeping a positive thought toward your safe travels there and back.

Your last letter brought back some delightful memories. I must admit that a lot of the humor did go over my head at the time, but I do recall seeing 'Charley's Aunt' at the theatre. It is one play that I hope to catch again as I am sure it will be humorous on an entirely different level now that I am older.

The suggestion from your mentor was a bit of a surprise. That whole bit about finding a suitable wife being practically a job requirement seems so mercenary, doesn't it? I will, of course, acknowledge that I probably have a highly romanticized notion of love and no real knowledge of an actual working marriage as my mother never took any matrimonial vows. But still, marrying simply to advance one's career or, as some of the young ladies here aspire, to bear children seems to be missing out on what I have hopes for. After all, children eventually grow up and leave the home. Careers are eventually retired from. Then all you are left with is a person that you joined with for a purpose that no longer exists.

For myself, I think I shall be looking for someone that I enjoy the company of foremost and let the rest come as it will. My mother enjoyed many things, but she was often so lonely. I do not want to follow in her footsteps. It might sound silly and perhaps it is, but I want someone that I could enjoy growing old with. I try not to voice that around here however. My views are regarded as quite unrealistic and childish. Well, if it is childish, then childish I shall simply have to be. I do not care to think of my personal life in terms of business transactions.

On to a pleasanter topic, I have discovered that some of the kitchen staff are from Italy and I think you hit on a wonderful idea. I wrangled permission to have a pair of the ladies assist in tutoring me in - not language, but cooking. However, once that permission was gained, I requested them to only speak to me in Italian. It might be wishful thinking, but I do believe my brain is being to wrap itself around the nuances more readily now. A few more weeks and I shall know for sure.

I will warn you now that I plan on enlisting your aid in a couple of years in regards to my darling Ermengarde. She is bright, but not exceedingly clever. From the way she speaks of the ideal life of her dreams, she will need to be paired with a gentle natured older man who desires a well-run, peaceful home. The type of man who wants a wife that is constantly in society, throwing and attending parties? The sort would make the poor girl into a nervous wreck, I fear. And I find I am growing far too fond of Ermengarde to allow that to happen. I almost feel as if she is a younger sister of a sort - which is quite odd as she is my elder in years. Still, she seems fragile in a way that makes me feel quite protective of her. Especially when Lavinia and the others of her set tease the poor dear.

As to Uncle William's feelings toward Ermengarde, they are returned by her ten-fold. How such an affectionate creature as herself sprang from her father is a mystery. I have met the man twice now and have yet to meet the fish that didn't have more personality than Lord Breckenridge.

Congratulations to Mister Stagg and his young lady. Will you be one of those standing for your
friend when he takes his vows? Weddings during the winter months seem quite sensible. Most of the clothing people tend to wear to such events would likely be stifling during the heat of summer.

Yours always,

Millicent

From: Thun, Switzerland

October 15, 1912

Dearest Alexander,

How current the news in the portion of the world where you currently are is, I am not at all sure. At any rate, this news will likely be old by the time you receive this letter. Still, I will still make mention of the stir it has caused here at the school that Montenegro had declared war on the Ottoman Empire. It seems that has encouraged the school to include more of the student body in classes on current affairs (students under the age of ten will still be left out, but that is more understandable). There had been an outing planned for some of the older girls to Greece which has, naturally, been cancelled.

Our dramatics instructor has given us our next assignment which we shall be performing just before many of the girls leave to spend the Christmas holidays with their families. She seems quite taken with Shakespeare and has chosen 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. I have been assigned the role of Puck. I begin to wonder if I shall ever be assigned a female role here. Oh well, I suppose I should just be grateful that I was not assigned the role of Bottom.

I suppose I shall have to confess that I am currently under treatment for a badly sprained ankle. The circumstances are terribly embarrassing, but I suppose time won't make them any less so. One of the younger students, Rosemary, was running and not paying particular attention to where she was going and ran into Ermengarde, who was standing beside me. We were unfortunately at the top of the stairs and when I saw Ermengarde start to fall, I automatically moved to try and catch her. To make a lengthy tale a bit shorter, between us, we managed not to take a tumble down the stairs, but I twisted my ankle in the process. All things considered, it could have been far worse. The only injury to Ermengarde is a bruise from where I grabbed her arm.

Poor thing, she feels so guilty about my ankle even though she certainly did nothing to cause it – unless one counts standing in the wrong place at the wrong time. The doctor who examined me said I shall likely be fine in around six weeks. For now, I have to keep the silly thing wrapped and elevated as much as possible. I feel remarkably awkward moving about with the aid of a crutch. Since I will not be permitted to continue with the firearms lessons until I am healed, I sincerely doubt that I will be able to reach my goal of being included in the hunting party this season. Ah well. Another case of best laid schemes going awry, I suppose. There is always next year.

My Italian improving isn't just in my imagination. My instructor commented on it just yesterday that I seemed to be letting my sentences flow more rather than over-thinking them as I had been. So thank you again for that suggestion. Perhaps after the first of the year, I will be able to find a way to get similar aid with my German diction.

I miss receiving your letters and look forward to when I will see one again.

Fondest regards,

Millicent
From : Thun, Switzerland
October 29, 1912

Dearest Alexander,

I wanted to drop a quick note so that you would know on your return that I received your postcard. I very much enjoyed the picture on it. I admittedly had not even thought about there being gypsies in that region. But I suppose that is rather the nature of gypsies to be in unexpected places as they are supposed to be a roaming tribe. I was very pleased to see it since it let me know that you had at least arrived at your destination without incident.

Learning lines seems to be going well enough for the 'Midsummer' play. I don't know if I mentioned that Ermengarde has the role of Hippolyta, the Amazon queen. She seems far more comfortable this time through and perhaps playing a warrior woman has had a bit of effect as she has only broken into giggles once and, since I nearly joined her in them, I can hardly fault her. Lavinia has the role of Titania, the Queen of the fairies and has been tending to walk with her nose a bit in the air.

I believe I have mentioned that Lavinia's nose is considerable and the effect is unfortunate, to say the least. Not only that, she seems not to realize it doesn't at all convey the effect which I think she is after. As it is, I now have a great deal of trouble maintaining a straight face around her since Ermengarde made the remark that perhaps Lavinia needs to keep her nose tilted back in order to maintain her proper balance. It would not have been at all funny had she meant it cruelly, but Ermengarde was being quite serious about her speculation, which is making holding back amusement at the mental image her words evoke even harder.

In other news, the swelling in my ankle has reduced greatly. It is still tender and quite colorful, but I've grown more adept with using my crutch, so I am doing much better at not accidently bumping it. The doctor says the greatest problem will be patience on my part so that I don't abandon the crutch too soon and put weight on the ankle before the healing has finished. At least I should be able to do away with it by the first of December.

We've been informed that our archery lessons will not resume in spring, though I have yet to hear a reason why. Instead, we will be learning some basic equestrianism. At least I like horses. Jesse seems to be of the opinion that all horses are like the ones Hercules encountered that ate flesh. Ugh.

Fondest regards,

Millicent

From : London, England
November 7, 1912

Dearest Millicent,

Travel to and from the Persian Gulf region was not without its share of challenges, but we have made it back to England unscathed beyond bouts of the troubles one has to expect when dealing with water in a foreign climate. The less that said on that particular topic, the better.

The man meeting us to act as a translator was an interesting chap named Thomas Lawrence. Born in Wales, believe it or not, but well versed in Arabic. Younger fellow that I would have assumed – just turned twenty-four. His French is very good as well. Not a lot that can be said about what happened while we were there. Just business and rather dull at that.
The times between meetings were fascinating however. Mister Lawrence and I were the two closest in age and he was kind enough to spend the better part of a day showing me many of the sights of the area once he saw my interest. I am afraid that most of those along for the trip tended not to care to have more than minimal dealings with the local peoples and even looked down on Mister Lawrence for his affinity with them. Perhaps His Lordship has a point when he says that our generation and his will fail to see eye to eye on many things due to the changes in the world. Still, it doesn't seem a very far-seeing policy to alienate the very peoples one would need to associate with to get anything done in this region of the world.

Terribly sorry to hear about the unfortunate incident with your ankle, but I am glad to read that you are on the mend. Your doctor is quite right. I had a sprain once myself and I made the error of re-starting normal activity again too soon. As a result, I only ended up extending the healing time by another two weeks. I trust you will be wiser in the matter than I was.

Regarding your archery lessons being replaced by equestrianism, I would have to venture that you are far more likely to find yourself in need of riding ability than archery skills. On a related note, having recently been forced to do a bit of travel by camel, I have to say that if your Miss Jesse had to deal with a camel for any amount of time, she would be far more pleasantly inclined toward horses.

I will be traveling to Scotland on the twentieth of the month. His Lordship has some business matters that he requested I tend to for him and I plan to mix business with a bit of pleasure and take the opportunity to visit some of my mother's family. I will likely be there until after the New Year (or Hogmanay as it is referred to there).

I have included the address where I will be most of the time, so direct any letters there as I doubt one would have time to reach me here before I depart.

Regarding your classmates, I am not sure how much assistance I will be able to give regarding Ermengarde, but as it isn't an immediate worry, we shall just have to see when the time arrives. On another note, I am glad that the odds are currently against my running into Lavinia socially. I am afraid I would also have a great deal of trouble hiding my amusement even though I am sure that the young lady's nose cannot be anywhere close to the size your letters have it imagined in my mind to be.

Yours most fondly,

Alexander

From: Thun, Switzerland

November 22, 1912

Dearest Alexander,

So now you are off to Scotland. I feel like such a stick in the mud staying in one spot while you are flitting about so. I have found that two of the young ladies here are from Inverness and are quite envious that you will be spending Hogmanay in their home country. As with myself, they will be spending the Christmas and New Years holidays here at the school. Apparently, only about a quarter of us do. There won't be any formal lessons during those days, so I suppose I shall have to come up with a way to keep myself occupied.

You will have to tell me about the area of Scotland that you are in. It is another of those regions that I never ventured to as my mother seemed quite convinced that we would be hip deep in snow should
we ever have traveled there. I never could quite figure out her aversion to snow. One would think someone from the Russian Empire would be quite used to the white stuff. Then again, perhaps that is part of the reason she left in the first place. We never did have a talk about why she left there.

I've never seen a camel up close and, from the way you speak of them. I am not sure that I would care to. Though I suppose I should like to ride one just once to see what the experience was like. Riding lessons or not, I cannot imagine that riding one bears much similarity to a horse.

Mister Lawrence sounds like he would be an interesting conversationalist. Did he mention what led him to that part of the world?

I will bear in mind your warning about sprains. The doctor saw me yesterday and said that if I behave, I will be off the crutch on the first. That will be a relief to our Dramatics instructor as I don't believe a Puck wobbling around with a crutch exactly lends the right tone to a fairy that is supposed to be able to put a girdle around the earth in forty minutes.

Yours always,

Millicent

From : Edzell, Scotland

December 4, 1912

I am perhaps sending this a bit early, but I decided that I would rather you receive your Christmas gift early than late. I have a decent feel for about how long letters take now, but parcels are a different beast altogether. Just something from the Persian Gulf marketplace Lawrence and I explored.

Coincidently enough, Lawrence also ventured the opinion that he would likely enjoy meeting with you. He considers most females under the age of fifty to be a waste of time in social conversation circles, but did concede that anyone able to keep three languages in their head while studying two others can hardly be considered to be a bit of fluff intellectually. He has in his time, I suspect, met a few too many of the giggling set.

As to your request to tell you a bit about the area I am in, I am in a small village in the Angus region. I should be surprised if there where over 500 people altogether here. Rather scenic little area though. The remains of an old motte and bailey castle (Edzell Castle, for which the village was named) are nearby and seem to be considered a nice place for a picnic. Not this time of year, of course.

While your mother's fear of knee-deep snows would only apply to a mouse (at least currently), it does get light very late and dark very early here this time of year. I am told it is quite the opposite during summer and one has to put heavy drapes over the windows in those months to get decent sleep.

I don't recall if I mentioned it in an earlier letter, but I am now getting use from my birthday present from you. The briar has even attracted a few admiring comments from those who know a good bit about pipes. Apparently briar pipes have an excellent reputation and I can see why. I find the pipe case and a tobacco pouch carry better than cigarettes and cigars. For one thing, you don't have to worry about a bit of rough handling.

By the time you receive this, you should, barring mishap be free of your crutch and just in time for your final rehearsals. I believe His Lordship means to try and attend your performance as Puck. I wish you the best of luck and wish I could see it for myself.
Yours most fondly,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

December 9, 1912

Dearest Alexander,

I hope my last letter reached you. I had not originally intended to send another until I heard from you, but one of my instructors heard me mention needing to send a package and kindly brought it to my attention that if I had any hopes of it reaching you before Christmas that I had best send it now, so I am jotting this short note to accompany it and trust it will reach you in time.

Come Christmas Eve, I shall be looking out at the night sky at the North Star at midnight. It was a fancy of my mother's that I have decided to keep up. We were occasionally apart at Christmas and that was our way of being together - to be looking at the same star at the same time from wherever we found ourselves. I find myself missing her terribly as I approach my first Christmas since her passing. I had not expected it to hit me again so hard so many months later.

Ermengarde has been an absolute brick for me, allowing me to reminisce on mother. She scarcely remembers her own mother who died in childbirth with her younger brother, who also did not survive. I have resolved that I shall endeavor to be kinder to Lord Breckenridge. A double tragedy such as that leaving him alone in the world with a tiny daughter would blight the personality of many a man, I am sure.

My crutch is now propped in a corner and I hope to never need to use it again. It is amazing how freeing it feels just to be able to walk at a normal pace again without a limp.

I will write to you on Christmas Day. I believe I will also send a note to Uncle Lucien. Things might be far different for us both had he not happened upon us when he did.

Merry Christmas, Alexander.

Yours fondly,

Millicent

From : Edzell, Scotland

December 25, 1912

My dearest Millicent,

A very Merry Christmas to you. Your letter and packet arrived on the last day the mail ran here. I opened the packet at midnight on Christmas Eve in view of the North Star.

The folding knife that you sent me is very nice. I don't believe I have ever seen anything like this 'Officers and Sports Knife' before. Rather clever the way that the Swiss have added the different features on it. Who would have thought of putting things like can openers and corkscrews together with a knife blade? I can see where this will be a handy item to keep with me, so I thank you very much for the gift.
There is to be a bit of a party tonight and I will be escorting Euphemia Ramsay to it. She is the daughter of an old friend of the family. Very capable dancer with about as fiery a head of hair as one can find in nature.

Things here rather shut down for the holidays, so the package I am sending along with this letter may not reach you in time for your birthday. If not, my sincere apologies and my hope that the delay won't impair your enjoyment of the day. Do they have any sort of celebration at the school when the ladies there have a birthday?

I know you that said you would be writing to me today as well. I trust that you and Ermengarde have enjoyed the season even though you were both far from home. Please give her my best. I look forward to eventually meeting the young woman that has been such a comfort to you. I am afraid that you will find, as I have, that the holidays will always bring back at least a bit of that sense of loss. In my own case, the memories have become fonder ones rather than sadder ones as the years pass.

Come New Years Eve, I shall look to the star again at midnight to wish you both a happy new year and a happy thirteenth birthday. I have to admit that you are quite right that you have a very easy birthday to remember. The only drawback might be that your age is very easy for anyone to calculate, but then I doubt that will be a problem for you. I cannot imagine that you will become one of those ladies that keeps subtracting from rather than adding to your age.

Fondly yours,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

December 25, 1912

Dearest Alexander,

Your package arrived in ample time for Christmas. I chose to wait to open it at midnight on Christmas Eve the way Mama and I used to do it. I have a good view of the North Star from my room this time of year.

The inlaid box is absolutely beautiful. I don't know what stones they used to make the pattern, but the effect is marvelous. Thank you so very much for sending it to me. I hope that my gift to you made it in time. If not, I do hope you will forgive the lapse.

Uncle William did make it here for our play again. Ermengarde was so happy to see him. I wish I had felt the same. Uncle William had a talk with me while he was here and he has my life mapped out for me. Not just until I turn eighteen. My entire life. And the life he has chosen is not one that I would care to live. I currently see no way around it - at least not yet. I don't know that I shall ever enjoy watching 'The Mikado' again.

Still, I will try not to dwell on what may happen five years from now and will instead immerse myself in my studies. As I said once while we were in France, a great many things can happen between now and then - not all of them within our control. The Wheel of Fortune card has landed in my favor before. Perhaps it will be kind enough to do so again.

I cannot keep my mind focused on writing as much as usual. My apologies and I will try to do better in my next letter. I trust your Christmas with your family has been a pleasant one and that the coming of the New Year will be kind to us all.
Yours always,

Millicent
From : Edzell, Scotland

January 1, 1913

My Dear Millicent,

My utmost apologies as I do not believe that I remembered to warn you in my letter on Christmas Day that I will be starting back to London tomorrow. I have arranged with my hosts that when a letter comes from you that they will forward it to me immediately since I doubt your Christmas letter will have the opportunity to arrive before I depart.

It has been an interesting time in Scotland visiting with my kin here, many of whom I had not seen since I was a lad of perhaps six years. One thing that this visit has settled in my mind is that, while I might enjoy spending the occasional times here as a retreat, this is not the sort of area I would care to make my permanent residence. London is far more to my current tastes. I have found that I rather like the feeling of being at the center of things.

In looking back over your previous letters, I believe I neglected to give you any further details on the coming nuptials of my friend George Stagg and his fiancé, Florence. They are to be wed on Friday, January 10 and yes, I will be one of the ones standing for George. I shall also be escorting his sister Evelyn again at the festivities.

I have my doubts that the sort of details that I will notice about the wedding will be the sort of details that might be of interest to you, but I will do my best to relay them along after the celebration is completed. I think George and Florence will make a good match. They both share several interests and Florence has a very nice laugh as opposed to the rather high-pitched giggle that Evelyn is still unfortunately prone to lapse into.

In international news, I have heard that Woodrow Wilson won the Presidential election in the United States and will be taking up the office in March. The Turkish/Italian war has ended, but only because war has broken out in the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire found itself with too many front lines to deal with. With all the unrest on the continent, I would have to guess that the older students of your school will be continuing to do without trips abroad.

As I said I would, I looked to the North Star as best I could at midnight. The sky was rather overcast and I hope that is not a poor omen for the coming year. I will be holding off on another letter until such time as your Christmas one catches up to me.

Yours always,

Alexander

From : London, England

January 6, 1913

My dearest Millicent,

Your forwarded letter reached me today and, I must say, that it has left me rather speechless. His Lordship has grandchildren within six years of your age, after all. All I can suggest is that you hold
to the course that you mentioned yourself of sticking to your studies and not worrying too much about it for now. I will endeavor to see if I can accomplish anything on your behalf in the meantime. He has control of the assets of your mother that were able to be recovered, hasn't he?

I had already spoken with His Lordship once after my return, but before receiving your letter. I do have to say reading your letter did seem to explain some of the reluctance I felt from him in answering my inquiries about how you were looking and doing. I think I should also mention that I managed to have a long talk with my mentor and he confessed to me that it was His Lordship that asked him to stress to me the importance of obtaining a suitable wife. I felt I needed to bring this to your attention as I am gathering from all of this that he might well be jealous of the connection you and I share. It might be prudent for you to avoid mentioning me in his presence. I will have to rely on your to keep me abreast of how you are through our letters.

To a pleasanter topic, I am glad that the inlaid box pleased you and hope that your birthday present has arrived by this time and is equally acceptable to you. Jewelry is such a matter of personal taste, but one of my female cousins assured me that a classical style can be adapted to most women's taste. Though perhaps I should be hesitant in taking the advice of a cousin who still blames me for a childhood incident involving her bedroom and a frog.

This will be a rather busy week here with the wedding only four days away. The entire affair is verging on the enormous. While I can see wanting to be wed surrounded by family and friends, I cannot see making it a spectacle to the point where even people one hasn't associated with since childhood are invited (or summoned, which seems more the phrasing of the invitations). Perhaps though that is only the prospective from the view of a bachelor. After all, George is going along with all of this. I'm not convinced that any of it is his idea however. It may well be more of a case of not wanting to stand in the way of Florence's mother. She is, shall we say, highly opinionated.

I know your next stage of testing is coming up in about four weeks, so I hope the situation over Christmas doesn't affect your concentration too badly. I realize that it is far easier for me to tell you not to worry than it is for you to carry on as usual. Having seen you in action in stressful situations however, I have every confidence that you will be able to maintain an even keel.

Your always,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

January 20, 1913

My dearest Alexander,

The weather here has been absolutely wretched, but the arrival of your last letter improved my mood considerably. I must admit that I had not considered jealousy as a factor in Uncle William's attitude on his last visit, but to be perfectly truthful, I was so stunned by his stated intent to marry me once I turn eighteen that I really did not have many thoughts that made a great deal of sense.

Before I neglect to mention it, I received the package you sent for my birthday. The necklace is lovely and I am currently wearing it. The design of the pendant is called a Celtic knot, isn't it? Is there more than one type? To answer your question, the usual way they allow us to celebrate our birthdays is to free us from classwork for that day and provide a bit of cake. Since my birthdate shall always fall when the school is closed for the holidays any way, it really doesn't mean a great deal to me.
I am glad that you liked the knife that I sent. Please understand that I didn't mean the slightest insult to your friend by doing so, but I showed Ermengarde your letter and pointed out Euphemia's name as an example of why her own name isn't so bad.

I am dreadfully sorry that I have gone so long without sending a letter, but I didn't want to write until my spirits had lifted somewhat. Our dramatics instructor seems stuck on Shakespeare and we are next tasked with Julius Caesar. Lavinia is our Caesar - Roman nose and all. I have never looked so forward to the Ides of March in my life. Which, amusingly enough, is the day that we will be performing it.

As usual, I have been cast in a male role. Not terribly surprising as the characters are overwhelmingly male. I am cast as Brutus - now you know why I am so looking forward to the Ides of March. One does not often get the chance to act on one's fantasies so vicariously. Ermengarde proved herself in the last production to have a lovely speaking voice and a knack for memorization, so she is our Mark Anthony.

The only reminder now of my ankle injury is a slight twinge when the weather gets particularly bitter. Several of the young ladies here have come down with horrid colds and are being segregated from the rest of us in the attempt to keep the whole school from coming down with it. Ermengarde and I have managed to evade it so far. One of the ladies who has been assisting me in my Italian lessons gave me a bottle of the most horrid tasting vinegar that you can imagine, but she swore to me that her grandmother makes it and says that if one takes a teaspoon of it daily, it helps ward off illness. I can well believe illness would not care to be in the same vicinity. But as we were informed one of the stricken ladies has developed pneumonia, I will continue forcing down that spoonful daily and encourage Ermengarde to do the same.

I hope you maintain good health as well during these cold winter months. Thank you again for the words of encouragement. They reminded me that I am not as alone as it feels at times.

Always yours,

Millicent

February 20, 1913

From : Paris, France

My dearest Millicent,

It seems that I will be on the move for the foreseeable future, but since I will be making frequent trips back to London to log my reports, it would be best if your letters to me go there. I will drop you the occasional postcard from wherever my assignments take me and save my letters for when I have one from you to respond to.

I saw Uncle Lucien just yesterday and he asked me to send to you his regards and his apologies for not responding to your letter. He is recovering from a broken arm and was in great sympathy for your recent ankle injury. Beyond the arm, he says he is doing very well and seemed genuinely happy to see me. We ended up having a very pleasant lunch together.

As to your question about the knot, there are several different patterns. The one I sent to you is one that I was told is called the Celtic Four. It is supposed to bring good fortune. It is also supposed to symbolize two who are separate, yet still together. That seemed very appropriate to me and I hope that you do not consider it as my taking too many liberties that I sent it to you. I mention that because
it is also called a love knot, but it is one that is also considered appropriate between friends.

Do try not to take too much pleasure in the scene where Caesar perishes - at least not so that anyone would notice. Brutus and he were supposed to have been friends, after all. Personally, I would prefer a friend that would tell me I was venturing down the wrong path by having a stern talk with me rather than by stabbing.

I have discovered that traveling with a pipe is a bit of an adventure all unto itself. I had not the slightest idea of the enormous range of pipe tobacco blends available. I suppose one day I will find a blend that I prefer and stick with it, but for now, I am quite content to treat them like wines and sample the different ones that I come across.

I will close for now so that I may post this on my way to the afternoon meeting. I hope that the concoction you are taking daily is continuing to safeguard your health as well as that of Ermengarde. Oh, and I am not sure how Euphemia would take her name being used as that sort of example, but as she is unlikely to find out, I should have to judge that as a case of 'no harm, no foul'.

Yours always,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

March 3, 1913

Dearest Alexander,

I will start by letting you know that the worst of the illness seems to be past at the school now. Ermengarde and myself (through either luck or the elixir) have managed to avoid catching it, but we lost one of the teachers here to it. Our testing was delayed for a week in deference to a mourning period for her. Miss Chapman had been a member of the staff here for nearly nineteen years. As she was the one that taught English to the non-native speakers, I did not have many dealings with her and so did not know her very well myself, but her loss was keenly felt among many of my fellow students.

I do realize that there must be many things that you cannot talk about in your current line of work, so I shall endeavor not to ask too many questions. It seems ages since I was last in Paris myself, but I suppose it was only three years ago. Seems a lifetime. I was very sorry to hear of Uncle Lucien's injury, but grateful it wasn't worse than a broken arm. Did he say what had happened to cause it? I must get off another letter to him, the dear man.

I am feeling the melancholia coming again, but I suppose I should expect that with the anniversary of Mother's death approaching. I wish I had at least been able to see where they actually buried her. Perhaps it would not have actually have given me the sense of an ending that it does in my imaginings, but as it is, I feel almost as if I have unfinished business.

In a way, I suppose it is fortunate that I have the play to concentrate on. Brutus does tend to be a bit long winded, so I have a goodly number of lines to memorize. He is such a tragic character, but if I may venture an opinion, not terribly bright. I have to agree with your assessment of his friendship. Pulling the man to the side and yelling in his face would have been the better course than stabbing. I've noticed, however, that any time Shakespeare puts the word 'tragedy' in a title, the characters seem to drop like flies. I suppose that is simply good theatre.

Regarding my test results, my Italian has improved to where I am considered over my age level, but
my German still sadly lags. Still, I have hopes that I might be able to eventually locate a native speaker to learn from. No offense meant to the ladies working here who are from Germany, but they have very thick regional accents. I have been told by one of the older girls that asking them to help me with a German accent would be very close to asking a Cockney to assist someone with their British accent.

My cooking score also improved. Not to the point where I would feel comfortable cooking for company, but at least were I called to do so, I would worry less about sending them to the doctor for acute indigestion.

I was quite interested that there are so many kinds of Celtic knots. I wear mine constantly though Ermengarde has warned me that I seem to rub it when I become preoccupied with thought. As for the pipe, I am glad it has become a source of entertainment. I cannot say that I ever gave any thought to there being more than one sort of pipe tobacco, but when one considers the variety of teas in the world, I suppose it only makes sense.

I shall keep a good thought toward your travels all being safe ones wherever they might take you.

Always yours,

Millicent

From: Athens, Greece

March 22, 1913

Dearest Millicent,

This letter will be quite brief as things are rather hectic where I am. I hope your school has been keeping to its recent policy of not letting your fellow students travel aboard. There has been a terrible situation that has arisen here in Greece. His Majesty King George of Greece was assassinated four days ago at Thessaloniki. During his fifty year reign, Greece and Great Britain have enjoyed amiable ties. I have my doubts that things will be as smooth under the reign of his son.

I will be in Greece for at least three more days. Tomorrow is the last day of the body lying in state at the Metropolis and the day after that will be the formal procession of the coffin followed by His Majesty's body being committed to the tomb at the palace in Tatoi.

I cannot say much more than keep you eyes and ears open, my dear. The world is in a state of flux that older and wiser minds than ours are fearing. I only pray that the spreading unrest does not reach where you are.

Keep well and safe. I will write again as soon as I am able.

Always yours,

Alexander

From: Thun, Switzerland

March 31, 1913

My dearest Alexander,
Your letter from Greece arrived very quickly. As you had hoped would be the case, the school again forbade the trip to Greece despite some of the girls putting up an awful stink about it. Those who did are being very quiet now. We received news that Bulgaria captured Adrianople about a week ago and it is expected that will end the Balkan War.

I feel peculiar bringing up any of the events happening year at the school when so many things of far greater import seem to be occurring, but as you likely know far more of those events than I, I suppose I shall stick to things happening here. I suppose that it what that saying 'tempest in a teacup' is really all about. Things that seem important where you are have no impact at all not so very far away.

The play came off fairly well. As instructed, I did my best to keep a look of glee from my features when it was my turn to stab Caesar. Despite the fact that even a moderately intelligent canine can be taught the trick, Lavinia seemed simply unable to grasp the concept of 'playing dead' after the stabbing scene. It rather ruined the lovely rendition of the funeral speech that Ermengarde performed when Lavinia kept waving to people in the audience from the bier where she was supposedly lying dead.

As I have no idea when you might possibly be able to return to London for your mail, I have decided to go ahead and send along your birthday present in hopes that you might possibly get it before the date. It isn't anything that requires regular feeding, so it will be quite alright waiting until whenever you are able to open it. At midnight when the clock turns over to the twenty-first of April, I shall look to the star with wishes for the year to be good to you.

I am not entirely sure why, but the headmistress here called me to her office to inform me that my records have been altered to show that I am Russian by birth rather than British and that if anyone should question me, that is the answer I should give. Ermengarde has gotten quite jittery about the entire thing. In her case, her records have been altered to say she is French (her late mother was French). For once, I am in agreement with Ermengarde that there is likely reason to be jittery. I am sure the headmistress wouldn't be doing this if it was not to help safeguard us, but from what we are not sure and it does make one rather nervous to try and guess. Perhaps it has something to do with your mention of the relations between Britain and Greece not being as kindly as they have been in the past.

The necklace you sent is a permanent part of my daily wear now. Superstitious or not, I want to keep my piece of luck with me. As always, I continue to pray for your safe travels where circumstance happens to find you.

Always yours,

Millicent

From : London, England

April 14, 2013

My dearest Millicent,

Please do continue to write about the things about you. My days have been a bit hectic of late and the touch of normalcy is a very welcoming anchor some days. I am sorry to hear that Lavinia did not grasp that Julius Caesar is a tragedy and not a comedy. I presume your Dramatics instructor has been correcting her misunderstanding.
Your headmistress may be quite wise to have more than one option in her files for you and your fellow students, but in your case, I am not quite certain that Russian will be of any advantage over British. Still, as she knows the local tone and politics far better than I do, trust in her judgment but keep your wits about you. Millicente Cheval served you well enough once and may serve you well again in the future. Never toss something into the waste bin that might be of use.

What you heard regarding the end of the Balkan War was correct. The treaty officially ending it is to be signed next month if all goes as expected. Despite that, there does seem to be unrest globally these days. News has reached here of what sounds to be devastating flooding in the United States and a revolution has broken out in Mexico.

Here at home, the suffragette movement has been taking an increasingly violent edge. While I am quite sure that an educated woman's opinion is every bit as valuable as that of an educated man, I cannot say that I care for violence as the way to express any opinion. Too much like the solution of Brutus toward Caesar's ambitions. I am not so naïve as to believe that there is always a peaceful solution, but I don't believe that violence leads to any sort of lasting solution either.

On a more personal note, I have made the acquaintance of another of the gentlemen that was well acquainted with your mother and, after sounding him out, explained some of the basics of the situation you have found yourself in with your Uncle. His intent is to convince His Lordship that, at your current age, it smacks of impropriety for the funds of your late mother not to be in a trust fund until you come of age. For his part, he advised me to tell you at this juncture to not argue with His Lordship's mentions of future plans. You needn't go so far as to agree with him, but so long as you don't argue, he is likely to simply assume you agree. Chin up and eyes to the horizon, my girl. The best of life is still before you.

I have found myself in London for a few days, though I have been instructed to keep a bag packed and at ready at all times. Your package was awaiting me when I arrived and I have tucked it into the bag to be opened on the appropriate day. If circumstances of where I am allow it, I will stand by at midnight as the date turns to the twenty-first to receive your good wishes. Some might cast stones at wishes and charms, but if they do no harm and might even remotely do some good, I am all for them.

Yours as always,

Alexander

From : Venice, Italy
April 21, 1913

My dearest Alexander,

As you could likely guess by the address above, I am not currently at my school. In truth, I am not fully sure exactly what is going on and I really only know two things, Uncle William approved of it and I am told that I will get to meet your Mister Lawrence. Another name is being added to my collection as I am traveling under papers identifying me as Victoria Campbell. I am told that Campbell is a Scottish name, so I suppose my necklace is in keeping with that. Which is good, because I have no intention of taking it off. The dragonfly was left at the school under the care of the headmistress.

I suppose this would be as good time of a time as any to mention to you that I have listed you as my next-of-kin in my file and the one to whom my possessions (such as they are) are to be released to in case of incident. I hope that does not bother you. I did it primarily because the most expensive thing
in my possession is the pin that you loaned to me and I want to make sure it ends up back in your hands regardless of what else may occur.

I do not know if circumstance will allow me to write again before I return to the school. The headmistress was told to expect that I would be gone for approximately six weeks. Does it sound awful that I worry less about this knowing that Mister Lawrence is involved? I suppose I have a terribly suspicious mind where Uncle William's motivations are concerned these days.

Ermengarde was terribly upset about my leaving, but promised to be extra diligent in her note taking so that I will be able to catch up on our lessons on my return. I hope that will keep her mind occupied. She does tend to be quite the worrier, but in a sweet way rather than an overpowering one.

I am only here in Venice until the boat arrives to take me on the next part of this journey. I must say that Venice is very lovely, but I do wish someone had forewarned me of the smell. I am taking this as it comes and hoping for the best. As you have advised me before, I am keeping my eyes open and staying wary. Life does throw one a curve when one least expects it. I did remember to look out of the window to our star at midnight. Happy birthday and many, many more to come, dear one.

Please keep a good thought towards me in my travels as I do toward you in yours.

Yours always,

Millicent

From : London, England

May 27, 1913

My dearest Millicent,

I have been away from London for an extended time and just arrived back again yesterday. In going through my mail this morning, I found the letter that you had written from Venice. It was rather an unpleasant shock. I have no idea what His Lordship is thinking, but I am going to see if there is anything that can be done to prevent him from treating you as his personal pawn. I can only pray that you make it back to your school safely. The region of Turkey where Lawrence is currently may not be as bad as some of the region, but it is certainly not a place where I would feel comfortable in sending a young lady - or even a young man for that matter.

I also had your postcard and a letter from Lawrence in the pile, so at least I do know that you made it to Carchemish safely. It does help as well to see Lawrence's assurances that he will personally see to your wellbeing. He made mention of how very tiny you are. I did mention when I described you that your build was rather on the elvin side. Perhaps the stories he heard as a child had elves as being stockier creatures than the ones in the tales I heard.

I was able to open my present from you at the appropriate time. The leather tobacco pouch will mark an improvement on the pouch I had been using for my tobaccos. Thank you very much for that.

It seems I am unable to come up with much in the way of things to talk of that do not involve where you are. Despite the Treaty of London being due to be signed in five days, from all reports, few of the tensions have lessened. I would not be terribly shocked if war broke out again before the treaty is even signed. One of the several reasons that I hope you will be back in Switzerland reading this soon.

I've sent Lawrence a note asking that he drop me a line when you depart from Carchemish and I
have no doubt that you will send a letter to let me know when you have arrived back in Thun. It seems both of us have become travelers whether that was our intent or not, doesn't it? As you yourself have noted, one never knows what is ahead.

Yours always,

Alexander

From: Carchemish, Turkey

June 22, 1913

My dearest Alexander,

This letter will be posted as we leave Carchemish. I've have been here longer than expected, but Lawrence is coming with me. He is headed to England and will be dropping me off on the way. You will doubtless hear the same from him in his letter, but with the situation in the area, he felt more comfortable with the idea of escorting me rather than trusting that to others. He is of the same opinion as you that the outbreak of another war is looming.

I have found him to be an intriguing man during the time we have gotten to know one another. He even introduced me to Miss Fareedeh, who was one of the ones that helped him to learn Arabic. I've picked up a bit of it myself from the time I've spent here. Not enough to say that I can speak it, but I can at least get the gist of some conversations and manage to make myself understood—albeit on the level of about a four-year old child. Still, that is more than I could have done two months ago. There is just something about learning languages that appeals to me. Or perhaps it is simply that I cannot bear for a conversation to be going on that I cannot comprehend in the least. However, if I must choose between describing myself as either intellectually curious or nosy, I think I shall remain intellectually curious.

The Euphrates remains in flood and, for some reason last month, Lawrence decided to try his canoe out on it. I think he was trying to prove some point or other to the other men when he asked me to accompany him, but as I deem him not to be the suicidal sort, I agreed to go. Not a bit like the Thames, I must say. It probably does not say a great deal for my common sense, but I found it rather exciting. By the by, I believe you formed the wrong opinion on him regarding women. It isn't that he only views those over fifty as being good for conversation, it is that only those over fifty have tea parties and other gatherings where the conversation is worthwhile. You were right, however, in your thought that he has run into a few too many gigglers.

When I return, I hope to find a letter from you which I shall read as soon as I manage to get Ermengarde to release me. I am fond of her, but I must admit she is a touch clingy, so I fear that I shall not be able to move out of her sight for at least a week after my return. I suppose it is a good thing that I was well forward in most of my studies as I now have a two month gap to make up.

There are other things I would like to tell you about these days here, but that shall have to wait until I am back at school.

Yours as always,

Millicent
My dearest Millicent,

I have spent the morning with Lawrence and he warned me that I might be waiting a week or so before you will have the breathing room to sit down and write something that is not school related. I was puzzled at first, but then I recalled that you have your next examinations in just over a month and have two months worth of work to catch up on before that time. If you are able to take the time to read this, please do not feel that you need to write anything back. Wait until after your exams are over and then write when you can draw a decent breath again.

I must say that you made quite the impression on Lawrence. He says you learned more Arabic in that short amount of time than some who had been there for over a year. I am sure that intellectual curiosity on your part made all the difference. The others are likely quite capable but lack the desire. Fond as I am of our homeland, it does seem a bit pompous to expect everyone else to learn our language. Especially in the cases of the languages that pre-date English.

Lawrence also made note that you were absolutely fearless. I do not think that he actually expected you to agree to get into that canoe with him. To tell the truth, from his tone when he was telling the story, I believe he hadn't intended to go out on the swollen river, but when you took him up on his offer of a ride, he couldn't very well back down then, could he? I likely find that far more amusing than I should as you could both have been hurt, but since it is past and you are both well, I don't suppose laughter at him essentially tricking himself is too amiss.

By the by, Lawrence told me of the service that you provided and said that you did an absolutely splendid job. I understand now why you hesitated to write about it. I would actually advise that neither of us write directly about it. Simply seems prudent not to commit some things to paper.

While I know you were quite capable of doing what was required and doing it well, that does not keep me from being cross that His Lordship put you into such a position in such a volatile region. The two of you barely made it out of the region before war broke out again as I know you are aware. His Lordship and I had a few words - and most of them were barely civil.

If the things I have tried to set into motion succeed, you will likely be receiving what I hope will be good news before long. I simply no longer have any faith that His Lordship will put your welfare ahead of his concerns. He actually helped my project himself, though I am quite sure such was not his intent. His Lordship made mention of his intent to wed you to a pair of highly unsympathetic ears that have a rather gossipy mouth attached to them. The timing could not have been more advantageous had I planned it so.

Back in France, in what seems now like another lifetime, you gave me your trust. I ask that you continue to trust in me and that I will do all that I am able to ensure your welfare.

Yours as always,

Alexander
August 16, 1913

My dearest Alexander,

Remind me never to wager on the paths life might lead one on. What a difference and in less than a year's time. Lord William is livid and I daresay that had the trust not already been established, my mother's things would likely have been 'lost' again.

I do not know that I want to know how you arranged for one of Her Majesty's ladies in waiting to assume ward ship over myself, but I am grateful. When I say Lord William was livid, I do mean that he did arrive here in person and was most unpleasant. Had the letter not already been received by the headmistress informing her of my alteration in status, I daresay it would have been far more unpleasant. He informed me that he expected me to keep the promises made between us when I turned of age and I reminded him that, while I did not argue with him, neither had I made any promises nor was I likely to so commit myself. I did believe for a moment that he was about to be stricken with apoplexy. I cannot say I had ever seen anyone's face turn that shade of purple before.

My testing went well enough, I suppose. Not the marks I would have preferred, but despite my long trip, I managed to be at the level expected for my age in all subjects. In retrospect, I think I shall considered the life lessons gain to have been worth more than the class room instruction lost. I can catch up on the class room part, after all.

I am pleased that Lawrence speaks well of me, but the language part of that is truly very little to my credit and more to the discredit of those who have not picked up more. There is, I think a large difference between not caring to learn and refusing to learn. As far as the canoe incident is concerned? If that was his intent, it served him right.

Did the two of you enjoy your time together? I know it must have been brief as he was trying to cram a great many things into his visit before returning to Carchemish. Considering the date, I suppose he is already back there or preparing to leave. I don't believe he will ever be able to settle down into a more normal life in the English countryside. Or even a city. Some are born with a wandering foot, as my mother would say. I believe he is one of those.

Speaking of learning, the digs around Carchemish that I was taken to see are fascinating. Should you have an opportunity to view them when there is not war looming, I recommend. Interesting as it was, I am glad to have been out of the region before hostilities broke out again.

As expected, Ermengarde has been a bit of a leech, though she was highly disappointed when she came to understand that Lord William is unlikely to come by again. She has not had a kind history with men in her life, poor dear.

That brings in mind a question I wanted to ask. I find that I know little to nothing about your family. If you wouldn't mind, would you tell me a bit more about them? I am embarrassed to say that I am not even sure whether or not you have siblings beyond a fake French one.

Stay well and, as always, my thoughts go with you.

Always yours,

Millicent

From : London, England

September 3, 1913
My dearest Millicent,

I was glad to hear that the foray from your school did not affect your grades too adversely. I cannot even begin to imagine the effects that something like that would have had on my own scores in the day. It isn't that I did poorly, mind you. I believe I was at the top of my forms, but some of those scores came with heavy studying on my part.

The news that you are happy with the changes in your arrangements is quite a relief. There were things occurring behind the scenes of which I was unaware of at the time that hurried things along faster than I had expected. Apparently the same individual I mentioned that was not sympathetic to His Lordship's intent to wed you is the same one that put a bug in Her Majesty's ear about the unrest in Europe and the effects that might have on English born children attending schools on the continent.

Two nights ago, I was invited to attend the opening night of a new play by Shaw called 'Androcles & the Lion' by Evelyn Stagg (who I believe I have mentioned in a previous letter) and her betrothed, one Gerald Harwood. Rather a short play but enjoyable enough though I admittedly am not often fond of slapstick comedy. I am certain that I received a few stares when I had to cover a laugh with a cough. One on the main characters names was Lavinia.

Lawrence and I did have a rather enjoyable time together before he departed to spend some time with his family. He is of the same opinion as you are that I need to try and see Carchemish one day and, if the region ever settles enough, I should like to go. With my current position in the diplomatic branches, however, getting permission to travel in that area is currently out of the question. Plus, I am currently far too occupied with my work to be able to take off a sufficient amount of time that the journey would require.

By the time this letter reaches you, I will likely be on my way to Athens, Greece. I am to be accompanying Sir William Seeds as he leaves his post at the British Embassy there to take up his new role of Chargé d'Affaires and British Consulate General in Lisbon, Portugal. I will be covering a great deal of ground so I will likely not get a chance to see any letters from you until sometime around November. I will send along postcards from some of my stops so that you can have an idea of where I might be at a given time.

You made a request for some background on my family, so I will endeavor to do so. I will start with my immediate family in this letter and cover the other portion in the next, otherwise I fear it will be too much for one sitting.

My father was Jonathan Arthur Waverly – I was told that my mother used to jest that, with his initials, having a prominent jaw was inevitable. He was born in 1864 at Keyford, Somerset. My mother was Leslee Fia McGregor born in 1873 at Inverness, Scotland. Her own mother was from the Angus district and lived in Brechin which is about five miles from Edzell where some of her relatives still live (the ones I visited during the Christmas season).

Their meeting was a highly unlikely one. My father traveled to Scotland at the invitation of an old friend of his mother's - Sir Benjamin Baker, the same civil engineer who was one of the primary designers of the Metropolitan Railway in London. It was in 1890 that a bridge he helped design, the Forth Bridge that connects Edinburgh to Fife, was opened on the fourth of March.

It was an extremely important event - the Prince of Wales was there to drive the final rivet, so there were a great many in attendance beyond my father. How he and my mother caught one another's eyes? That tale I was never told, but they wed exactly one year after that meeting, on March 4, 1891. I myself entered the picture just a bit over a year later on April 21, 1892. By that time, my parents had settled in Northamptonshire.
My mother developed an illness when I was about four. The exact nature of it is unknown to me as, of course, it would not have been something discussed around a child of my years. However, it could not be hidden from me that she was not well as she went from being my primary care-giver to someone I was allowed to visit in her bedchamber on good days, so obviously whatever it was, it was not contagious. She eventually was able to leave her sickbed by the time I was seven. Her health was never really the same. She was expecting to give birth when her final collapse came. As you came into the world at the start of the 1900s, she departed it a few weeks past my eighth birthday. My younger brother, Peter, only survived her by two days.

My father never remarried, but one of my mother's sisters, Avelina, came down to join our household and take over raising me as my father threw himself into his work. I did not see a great deal of him during the remainder of my pre-teen years. I did not spend much time at home myself. Come the fall of 1900, I was enrolled at Wellingborough. I boarded there, spending only the holidays at home, and finished my education there in 1910. My father was there to see my graduation and presented me with tickets for travel on the continent as he had the view that it would help finish rounding out my learning.

It had been intended that I would be gone until my twentieth birthday. I had already spent several months in France and had traveled on to Italy. I had been there for about four months when I cut my intended travels short when the news reached me that my father had been injured in a train collision at Stalybridge on June 7, 1911. He unfortunately succumbed to his injuries before I was able to return. I do regret that we never had an opportunity to ever really speak man to man.

Of course, you know very well where I was in April of last year. An unexpected turn in my life, but I certainly cannot say that it did not have its rewards. It has been nearly a year and a half since we first met and I hope the acquaintance has been as enjoyable for you as it has been for me. You are a remarkable young lady and I have no doubts that you will develop into an equally remarkable young woman. I have hopes that we will maintain our correspondence so that I can continue to watch the transformation, albeit from afar.

Yours as always,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

September 30, 1913

My dearest Alexander,

We are told that the second Balkan war has ended now, but the tone with which our instructor mentioned that fact seemed to imply that the ending of the second might be as short-lived as the ending of the first. The staff from the areas near that region aren't trying to go home – they are trying to bring their families here to them. I don't believe anyone would take that as an encouraging sign for lasting peace in the region. I do hope Lawrence is careful.

I hate to say this, but there was a bit of an incident last week when the dragonfly pin that you lent me went missing for a short time. I say short time because do believe that I harried everyone within listening range endlessly until it was found. I was grateful that I had left it in the head mistress's care for that time while I was away. Because of that, she knew the piece on sight as well as I did.

It was finally found in the possession of Lavinia's maid. Yes – Lavinia is one of those few that actually has a maid of her own here. Or rather, had. I have my doubts as to whether that young
woman was actually responsible for the theft or not, but the head mistress made Lavinia choose between dismissing the maid at once or being expelled. She is also not allowed to retain a new maid until after the New Year. They might have to give in on that last stipulation. Otherwise both Lavinia's hair and clothing will look a fright. In just the last week, the change has been startling. I think this has been her first experience with having to get dressed without any assistance in her life. As for taking care of her clothing? I doubt she would recognize a hanger. There is a laundry staff here at the school, of course, so she won't come totally undone, I suppose. The same could not be said for her hair.

Regardless of who may have had it, it is back safe with me and the headmistress has done me the favor of having a safety box set aside for my usage so that I may keep in and my other things I prefer untouched away from certain hands, while still being able to access them myself. Your letters to me are going to be going in there as well. I could swear some of them are not as I had them.

I found reading of your family to be very interesting. I did not realize all of your immediate family is gone as well. Possibly I should have guessed as you have been so understanding and supportive in helping me deal with my own grief. I suppose it is one of those circumstances where experience is a thorough, but harsh teacher.

I do look forward to hearing about the rest of your family. For now though, I send my continued wishes for your safe travels. I do not believe a day goes by that you do not pass through my thoughts.

Always yours,

Millicent

From : SS Stampalia in route to Portugal

October 11, 1913

My dearest Millicent,

I can only hope that you have received the letter and postcards that I have sent. This letter won't be sent until we reach Lisbon, but if the weather holds, that shouldn't be much longer.

I decided to take some of this quiet period aboard the ship to continue with answering your questions about my family. I suppose I will begin with Aunt Avelina, who was very much a second mother to me. One reason she traveled down to London to assist in my care was that she was a recent widow with two children of her own, both very near to me in age. Coira is two years older than I am and Amelia close to two months younger. As they had lost their father and I my mother, we bonded over our mutual losses with their mother being the female head of house for us all and my father serving as the male head. Though she and father never wed, Coira, Amelia and I consider ourselves as siblings and, if you hear or read of me speaking of a niece, that is Coira's first born daughter.

If this isn't already complicated enough, my dear Coira married Arthur Waverly, the eldest son of my father's younger brother (they, of course, being of absolutely no relation to one another though he is my first cousin) and so is now Coira Waverly. Amelia is currently seeing a chap named Hemingway and that relationship seems to be going well enough that I think another wedding is in the offing. Hemingway is an academic sort and has plans on sticking with teaching.

Aunt Avelina is still with us and is still keeping up my family's home. It was my father's intent and remains mine that she can live out her days there if such is her desire.
Speaking of my father, that dragonfly broach that is currently with you was an anniversary gift from him to my mother in 1899, the year she was finally able to get out of her sickbed again. Due to her wishes to see it again and as a celebration of her health getting better, we traveled as a family to Paris. She wore it constantly while we were there – I suppose I will always think of France when I see it. Not long after our return, Mother's doctor visit confirmed her pregnancy and, as I mentioned in my previous letter, her health was simply too fragile.

When I return to England in around three more weeks, I plan to take a little time to check on the graves of my parents. I believe I will see if I can locate your mother's as well to make sure it is being properly maintained. I am sure someone can point me in the correct direction.

I will see if I can find some more attractive postcards to send along between letters. The holiday seasons are approaching again, but I must say the mood of the areas that I've been are far more tense than festive. I will likely be sending you your Christmas present while I am in Lisbon. Or will as soon as I can think of what to send. You, my darling girl, are a bit of a puzzle for me to shop for. If I ever muck up, I do hope that you will appreciate the intent behind it, if not the item itself.

Time for me to do a bit more clerking work for Sir Seeds, so I will close for now.

Yours as always,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

November 1, 1913

My dearest Alexander,

First, let me tell you that I have been receiving your postcards and letters. I enjoyed the story behind your family and would very much like to meet them should the opportunity ever present itself.

I feel a bit uneasy after seeing the recent newspapers from home. You were gone during it, but there were a series of horrible incidents that they are referring to as 'Black Week'. You will probably have already heard of it, but I will go ahead and make mention of it as it is so thoroughly in my thoughts at this time.

It apparently started on October 10. The ship Volturno caught fire during a storm while in route to New York. Reports vary, but apparently between 130 and 136 died - but the majority of the deaths were not from the fire, but from the lifeboats being launched incorrectly and causing the deaths of all of the women and children that were aboard them. Four days later, there was a massive mine explosion in Wales near Cardiff. The death toll from that is over four hundred. And then, the next day in Liverpool, two express trains collided.

Perhaps it is all coincidence, but with so much unrest, I cannot but wonder just how accidental these events were. I suppose I am just feeling paranoid. I do hope that I will hear soon that you are safely home. At any rate, the incident with the Volturno combined with the Titanic has quite squashed my desire to make an ocean voyage to New York for the time being.

I appreciate that you are thinking of seeing to Mother's grave for me. It has always bothered me that I do not even know precisely where it is, let alone the condition it is in. I don't expect or insist that the accoutrements of her grave be lavish, but I want them to be decent enough that no-one passing by thinks she died a pauper.
As you may well be called away again before the holidays arrive, I am going ahead and sending your Christmas present to make sure that you should have it before the day. It does not seem that Christmas is next month already. This year seems to have gone by as a blur somehow.

As with last year, the majority of the young ladies here will be heading to their homes for the Christmas holidays. If you should ever find yourself in this part of the world during the season, I do hope you will find time to drop in. The company would be greatly appreciated.

Oh, I cannot recall if I mentioned it or not, but I believe I will be trying to take up further studies in the Arabic tongue. I suppose you can justifiably blame Lawrence's influence for that decision. Speaking of languages, I must close for now. I promised to help Ermengarde with her French lesson.

Always yours,

Millicent

From : London, England

November 19, 1913

My dearest Millicent,

You guessed well when you thought that my stay in London would be short-lived. I arrived back yesterday, I will leave back out tomorrow. I am taking a bit of time now for myself - and you - before going back to my preparations.

Whoever it actually was responsible for the dragonfly disappearing, they obviously did not take into account your tenacious nature. Thank you for taking such good care of it and I must remember to pass along thanks to your headmistress as well.

Speaking of care, I think you will be pleased to know that your mother's grave shows all signs of being well tended. There is a small statuette perhaps a bit over three foot tall that looks like it is intended to depict your mother in one of her dance moves. It stands beside the marker which in itself is a bit plain perhaps, but attractive. The front has a single carved rose stem with one fully bloomed rose and a rosebud on it and her dance name Aglaya in script rather than in block letters. The only other markings are on the back where her birth year and death year are carved. I have the location noted and, when you are able to come to London, I will take you to see it.

I have the package from you tucked away in my luggage already as it is very questionable if I will be back before the holidays. I was able to find something that I hope you will enjoy and mailed it from Lisbon, so you should have it by the time this letter arrives.

While I wish I could take more time with this, my time before my next departure is short and my to-do list lengthy. When I will be able to devote proper time to a letter next is unknown, but I will continue to drop postcards when I am able.

Always yours,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

December 2, 1913
My dearest Alexander,

I know the odds are against you seeing this until next year, but I wanted to drop this note to let you know that the package from Lisbon arrived as well as your letter that you wrote last month.

Thank you so much for finding my mother's gravesite. Perhaps if I cannot visit it in the near future, I could possibly get a photographer to capture the image for me so that I can see it for myself. I suppose photographs have come to mind as the lady in waiting that I am now a ward of has sent a photographer to the school so that she might get a look at what I look like. I suppose it might lead to awkward questions if someone were ever to ask her about me.

She has also requested that I write her at least twice a year so that I might keep her abreast of my studies and the progress I have made. I will, of course, endeavor to keep her happy as she has made my life far simpler. Except, of course, for Lavinia. But then, Lavinia is a force unto herself and rather like a mosquito. Even when she isn't biting, her buzzing can make one mad. I try to ignore her, but she lays the blame for the loss of her maid on my shoulders and has become most unpleasant of late. Not that she was the most charming of companions before, but at least then she was just being herself. Now she seems to go out of her way to be rude.

I will be keeping the package to the side as I did last year and open it on Christmas Eve at midnight. This year seems to have fairly flown by with as many things as have happened in it. Where ever your travels find you on Christmas, I hope that you are safe and well. You will certainly be very prominent in my thoughts.

Always yours,

Millicent
From: Florence, Italy

January 1, 1914

My dearest Millicent,

First, happy birthday, my darling girl. I stayed up until midnight to wish it on our star, then found myself too awake to sleep. Hence this letter being written in the very early morning hours.

I must admit that I rather enjoyed the look of surprise on your face when your headmistress called you to her office and you saw me there. My word, if it weren't for those eyes of yours, I don't know that I would have known you. You must be a good four inches taller now and I can see why Lawrence was referring to you as tiny. It wasn't your height. That growth spurt of yours has made you willowy.

I feel a bit deceptive with your headmistress as she seems to continue to mistakenly assume that we are related, but I wasn't about to object since it allowed us to leave the school grounds together and spend Christmas in town. It was most enjoyable to be able to exchange our gifts in person for once. Speaking of gifts, I know by the time I am writing this that you will have opened my birthday present to you and hope that you like it.

You might be wondering what I am doing in Florence, Italy. I am not exactly sure myself. The famed Mona Lisa painting, as you may have heard, was stolen from the Louvre some time ago. It was recovered just a few weeks ago here in Florence. The thief is claiming that he believed that painting had been stolen by Napoleon from Florence. Apparently there is some concern in some quarters that someone else was behind the theft. While that does not seem to be the case and I am not certain why my services were requested, I certainly didn't object to seeing Florence even if under these circumstances. The Mona Lisa has been returned back home, as I will be heading home myself soon if nothing else crops up.

I should mention that with the blustery weather here, I have already made good usage of the scarf and gloves you gave me for Christmas. I wish we would have had more time together, but perhaps we will not have as long between visits in the future.

Always yours,

Alexander

From: Thun, Switzerland

February 18, 1914

My dearest Alexander,

As you suggested, I have waited until after testing to write. I am pleased to report that even on the dreaded cooking and sewing tests that I have now reached the point of being at my age level. Not that I would be seen in public in anything sewn strictly by my own skills, but being able to adjust the fit of my own clothing is quite handy.

Last month, we all made a field trip to St. Moritz to view the World Championship Figure Skating
competition. The men's will be held in Finland in just a few days, but we watched the women's single and the pairs competitions. It was thrilling for me to get to see Phyllis Johnson perform representing Great Britain. She didn't manage silver as she did last year, but still finished in the medals with a bronze. It seems peculiar that they didn't just have all of the competition at the same time.

Watching the competition rather made me want to learn the basics of ice skating - not that I ever intend to compete, of course. From the conversations around the school, I daresay I am not the only one with those sort of thoughts following the trip.

Before it slips my mind, thank you for my birthday present. The bracelet is lovely. As for my Christmas present, I have gotten all of the postcards you have sent me to date into the album. I went through a good deal of debate between myself and Ermengarde deciding how best to arrange them, by subject, by place of origin or chronologically. In the end, I have decided that placing them by the date they were written is the method I will stick with. I don't want to wear out either the cards or the album by constantly reshifting them.

I cannot adequately say how much you being able to be here for that short time over the holidays meant to me. Lavinia took exception to the fact that I had a visitor and has made a few nasty remarks. I certainly cannot see where she thinks it is any business of hers. I am glad that she is a year older as that means I should be able to have relative peace during my last year of school. That's sounds horrid of me, but she does manage to get on my nerves on a regular basis. Surely that has to be intentional.

As I know your travel schedule is rather unpredictable, I am going ahead and sending your birthday present. I am trying to make sure anything I send is small enough to be packed along until the time comes to open it. I hope it will not be terribly long before we get to see one another again.

My love to you always,

Millicent

From : Belfast, Ireland
March 7, 1914

My darling Millicent,

As you will note from the address, I am now currently in Ireland to take care of a bit of business. You might be interested to hear that I watched the launch of the sister-ship of the Titanic on February 26. I certainly hope the RMS Britannic has better luck on the seas.

I have heard through channels that Lawrence is involved in the sort of activity you were drawn into before. There is always a chance that you might be drawn into such things again yourself. Please do pay attention to your instincts. If something feels dodgy to you, trust the feeling and avoid it. While I know most of the work is important, some of the people over the projects play too loose with lives for my liking.

On to pleasanter topics. I did receive the package you sent and have it safely tucked away until my birthday arrives. I am happy that you enjoyed the bracelet. I was also glad to hear that you have made use of the postcard album. I know that postcards are not very good substitutes for a letter, but at times, they are the best I can manage.

I have never been able to watch much in the way of figure skating, but I imagine you would be quite good at anything you truly set your mind to. You have quickness and a sense of balance that would
likely be in keeping with that sport. It was nice that your school was able to find a field trip fairly 'close to home'. Traveling the continent with a gaggle of young just doesn't seem very safe with the current tensions.

As far as Lavinia goes, I would advise you to avoid her, but I know that you already make every effort to do so as far as the confines of a school environment allow. It has been my general experience that when someone goes so far out of their way to be unpleasant that it is usually quite personal. It might be possible that she feels that you are in a place above what your station in life should be - which is, of course, a ridiculous thought. Frankly, I think it more likely that she is envious of you - a high possibility with your intellect and appearance. Try and keep an eye on her. If she thinks you are reaching beyond your station, she is likely to be petty. If it is jealousy? Well, again, it has been my experience that jealousy makes both men and women vindictive.

I join you in the hope that it will not be as long between visits for us. Your boarding school is a bit out of the beaten track, so to speak. Were you closer to either London or Paris, visits would be more frequent. But you have less than four years remaining at school and less than three with Lavinia. You may well be the only one looking as forward to her graduation as she is. Speaking of graduation, have you given any thought as to where you might settle once you are of age?

I have been working on this after supper and I suppose I should finish it now so that it can go out with the morning post. Do try and keep an even keel, my dear. I look forward to your next letter.

Yours as always.

Alexander

From : Aqaba
April 21, 1914

My dearest Alexander,

First off, let me send a repeat of the birthday wishes that I sent last night. I hope this new year treats you well and that you continue to enjoy good health and happiness. I started to say that I hoped this year would treat you kindly, but I have the feeling that these are less than kindly times.

I do hope the address this came from is not too upsetting. Circumstances rather spiraled a bit in a way that is a bit too complex to go into in a simple letter. On the positive side, it does seem that the assurances of my safety in the region were correct even if they were not correct that Lawrence would be here at the same time as I was. He had already departed for Carchemesh before my arrival. Indeed, I am fairly positive from speaking with the locals that he was never even informed that I was coming. While I would feel a great deal more at ease if Lawrence actually were here, that is rather like wishing for any number of other things I might like, but cannot have.

Needless to say, I am being forced to increase my knowledge of the local languages rather quickly, so it is a good thing that I am a quick study. I have also taken up the hobby of landscape painting. I have found it to be very useful for calming my mind and I also find I can do other things while painting. As I am not striving for museum quality, I just let my hand and eye wander off while my brain and I ponder other things - even if nothing more serious than what I shall have for tea. One of my instructors at school mentioned once that when she was a slip of a girl herself, she painted on china. I suppose the advantage to canvas is that one needn't worry so much about breakage.

I shouldn't bother sending anything to me at this address as I have no inkling yet of how long I shall
be here. I was promised that I wouldn't be kept from the school long, however as other statements have proved less than accurate, I am taking promises now with a grain of salt. Truthfully, more like a pound of salt.

Regardless, I look forward to seeing whatever letters and postcards that you have sent to me when I return to the school. Considering how I worry about you, I realize it is quite foolish to ask you not to worry about me, but at least know that I shan't take foolish chances if they can be avoided. I think I shall send along a couple of the paintings that I have completed. While I might not paint with great talent, perhaps enthusiasm makes up for that lack somewhat.

All of my love,

Millicent

From : London, England

May 20, 1914

My darling Millicent,

You are, little doubt, wondering why this letter from me is contained within a package to you from your current guardian. Not to mention the small bundle of postcards that I had sent to you that were returned to me by your school. I fear that is a bit of a long story, my dear.

I will never disbelieve anything you have to say about Lavinia in the future. Not that I precisely disbelieved before, but I will admit to the assumption that you might have indulged in the occasional exaggeration. I now offer apologies for that assumption. There is now little doubt that Lavinia and/or her former servant indulged in more than a bit of theft.

I have recently received a packet from your headmistress which contained the afore mentioned postcards along with a letter informing me that I am no longer welcome on the school grounds and that any packages or letters sent by me will be confiscated due to a misrepresentation of our association. She was suggesting rather vulgar assumptions regarding our relationship that she claims were relayed to her by another of the students. Since I highly doubt that source was your devoted Ermengarde and I doubt even more so that you read any letter that came from me out to Lavinia, she had to have taken and read some of them during that period time before you were able to secure them away. Both Lavinia and the headmistress seem like they could do with less active imaginations. The headmistress rather made me out to sound like some sort of rake when she made mention of some of the young women I've escorted (her knowledge of names is how I am certain that my letters to you were read).

Please do not worry about my banning as I have already consulted with her Ladyship and she is fully on our side in this matter. She will be contacting the headmistress directly and spelling out to her who is and who is not allowed to have access to you both in person and by post. My messages to you are going to be relayed through her until we are assured that the situation has been cleared up.

I wish I felt more at ease with the extra sightseeing you are being asked to do. Please keep in mind that it isn't your ability to adapt and cope that concern me, but rather the highly volatile state of world affairs. Though I suppose I must admit that I would be hard pressed at present to suggest the one region is genuinely safer than another, but travel always puts one in a slightly vulnerable position.

On to another topic, thank you for the cufflinks you sent for my birthday. As it seems I am wearing suits more often than not these days, they shall certainly get their share of use.
I look forward to your next letter and hope that it brings me the news that you have returned to your studies safe and sound.

As always yours,

Alexander

From: Thun, Switzerland

June 8, 1914

My dearest Alexander,

I suppose it was just as well that I was away when all of that mess regarding you being able to contact me occurred. I simply do not know that I would have been able to hold my tongue had the headmistress voiced her opinions regarding our relationship to one another within my hearing. We have most certainly never behaved in any manner than I should be ashamed to mention to my guardian.

You are quite correct that the source of the trouble had to have been Lavinia. When I returned, she had an expression that my former nanny would have said looked like a cat which had choked on clotted cream. I think that she almost did literally choke when she overheard the headmistress apologize to me regarding the unfortunate mix-up as well as asking me to please contact my guardian that everything would be done by her wishes in regards as to your ability to both write to and visit me. This was quite puzzling to me as this was all said while she was handing me that package from her Ladyship that contained the letters and postcards that had arrived during my absence and been returned back to you.

When I was finally able to read through everything - which was, quite frankly, not until my temper had abated - I concluded that small safe boxes that I have seen some of the older girls with are not as frivolous an item to own as I had previously thought. It seems even more prudent since my guardian's letter mentioned a few of the simpler pieces of my mother's jewelry that she plans to send to me. I cannot abide the thought of Lavinia's fingers anywhere near my mother's things, so I have requested that she send a small safe box along with the pieces. As she has mentioned she has one herself for use while traveling, I am sure she will understand.

Regarding the jewelry, apparently ladies have differing views as to when it is appropriate for a young woman to begin wearing jewelry. My guardian is of the opinion that fifteen is the age that she considers appropriate for wearing simple jewelry. I am not terribly certain what she means by 'simple'. I suppose the selection that she sends to me that she deems appropriate will give me a clue.

I wish I could tell you more of my trip beyond assuring you that things went well and that I arrive back at school in good condition, though perhaps tanned quite a bit more than is fashionable. I do wish you were near enough that we could just sit and have a long chat. Dear as Ermengarde is, the darling girl simply is not one that I can have any sort of serious conversation with beyond the immediate concerns at school.

I miss you terribly and continue to hope for your continued good fortune in your travels.

With all my love,

Millicent
From : London, England

June 15, 1914

My dearest Millicent,

I may actually see you before this letter reaches you. Your guardian received your request and has whole-heartedly agreed that you should have a lock box for your more valued and private items. To my pleasure, she requested my services to insure the safe delivery of it and the jewelry pieces to you and the request was approved as I can combine it with another delivery to Bern. Due to the second delivery, I will only be able to remain in Thun for two days.

It is expected for us to report back if the headmistress in any way disregards your guardian's instructions, so if you experience any problems prior to or after my visit, do make sure to get word to her immediately. Preferably through a method that does not pass through the headmistress' hands. While that might sound a touch paranoid, I have found the saying that one can never be too cautious to be very true.

It is with that in mind that I look forward to the fact that we will be able to talk face to face soon, though that is not the only reason I look forward to it. I think I shall save everything else I want to say to you until we are together.

Until then, I am yours as always,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

June 23, 1914

My dearest Alexander,

It seems much longer than just yesterday that you left. I shall be writing my guardian later to let her know that you and the items in your care all arrived safely and to thank her for her many kindnesses. I still find it strange to contemplate just how very much her involvement has altered circumstances for me for the better and yet, she and I have never so much as been in the same room together.

Thinking back on it, I hope you didn't consider it too forward on my part to gift you with one of the photographs from the session my guardian arranged several weeks ago. It seemed perfectly natural at the time, but Ermengarde seemed quite shocked when I made mention of it in passing and thought it sounded quite vain of me to offer it when one had not been requested. Perhaps that is a level of etiquette that being the daughter of a dancer has ill equipped me for. My dear mother was a great one for handing out photographs of herself to those she considered close to her. I only hope that I did not cause you any embarrassment with the gesture.

The headmistress has behaved stiffly, but properly, around me since the letters from my guardian setting her straight on a few things. Ermengarde told me that she caught sight of Lavinia watching as we left when you escorted me into town and related that Lavinia was unmistakably furious. She apparently went straight to the headmistress and promptly had another shock when told quite plainly by the headmistress to mind her own business. Ermengarde is of the opinion that if an egg had been near Lavinia, it would have baked from the heat coming off of her. The end result so far has been that, outside of classroom instruction, if I enter a room, Lavinia tips her nose up enough to scrape the ceiling with it and flounces out. Which is a rather satisfactory outcome in my personal opinion.
You mentioned that you have some diplomatic courier duties to perform in Bern that might take the better part of a week, so this letter will doubtless reach London before you do. I must say again how very nice it was to be able to spend those two days with you. The one day we took for horseback riding and picnicking stands out as one of the pleasantest days I can recall.

With all my love,

Millicent

From : Bern, Switzerland

June 29, 1914

My darling Millicent,

I am taking just a few minutes to jot you this note to let you know that I won't be returning to London as previously expected. Events are going on that you will doubtless hear of soon enough and I have been ordered to travel to Belgium as one of the representatives from England to Albert, King of the Belgians.

Circumstances being as they are, it is difficult for me to know when I might be able to write again. If nothing else, I shall endeavor to send you a postcard from Brussels to at least let you know that I arrived safely.

Keep alert and keep yourself safe, my dearest. While I have hopes that I am being needlessly pessimistic, I fear I am actually being overly optimistic.

With love,

Alexander
From : Thun, Switzerland

July 6, 1914

My dearest Alexander,

I received your note telling me of your unexpected trip to Belgium. I have heard now, of course, of the horrid events in Sarajevo. The assassination of the Archduke was bad enough, but to murder the man's expectant wife? On the day of their wedding anniversary, no less. I know that the events are tragic regardless, but the circumstances seem to make them more so.

Two of our instructors are from Austria and there is talk of little else here. The two ladies have already turned in their notices as they fully expect there to be war between their homeland and Serbia. I have had the term 'slippery slope' before and never truly grasped the meaning. Hearing the news and how things are spiraling, I believe I comprehend the term all too well now.

A few of the young ladies here are also from that region and are, naturally enough, in a bit of a tizzy themselves. Some are positive that their families will call them home while the rest seem sure that their families will make them stay here and as far away from the coming war as possible.

I will do my best not to be impatient to hear from you as I know there are circumstances far beyond either of our control in action. For my part, I shall continue to write to you once a month. I will continue to send my letters to your London address unless you drop me a note to send them elsewhere.

I am sorry this letter is rather scattered. Viveka is currently in our room, sobbing her eyes out onto Ermengarde's shoulder. She is one of the Austrian girls, one of the youngest students here and very sensitive. She is the youngest of five children in her family and is afraid that her two older brothers may well become soldiers should war come to pass. As her brothers are twenty-two and eighteen, I fear she is right about that though I wouldn't tell the poor soul that for all the teas in China.

You will be in my thoughts nightly. God watch over you and keep you from harm.

All my love always,

Millicent

From : London, England

August 5, 1914

My darling Millicent,

First off, I have received and read the letters that were awaiting me when I arrived home. Let me assure you that I was quite pleased to have been given your photograph and any awkwardness that anyone else is trying to make you feel over that matter is sheer nonsense.

Slippery slope is indeed an appropriate term to use for these days. As you know, I was sent to Belgium as part of the delegation there to assure their government that the seventy-five year old promise to defend their independence that we gave them in the 1839 Treaty of London is still as
strong as ever. Germany decided to ignore the fact that Belgium is a sovereign nation and invaded its borders in order to use Belgium as a direct road to attack France. As a result of that, war was declared yesterday by Britain against Germany. Germany has already declared war on both Russia and France and is allied with the Austria-Hungary faction while Russia is allied with the Serbians.

I suppose now would be the time to tell you that I have enlisted through the Artists' Rifles and will be undergoing officer training. I fear this will mean that my correspondence will become more erratic, but I would greatly appreciate the continuance of letters from your end. My address for now will be through the 28th County of London Battalion - they will forward our mail to wherever we are stationed, so even when I am able to find time to write, answers to your letters will inevitably be delayed.

Since my current residence is only a rental, I will be giving it up and sending what possessions I decide to keep back to my family home. I will be going there tomorrow to say my goodbyes to Aunt Avelina before reporting to my battalion.

War being as it is, I will not be able to write to you regarding where I am or exactly what is going on, but I promise that I will write as I can to you. We have been instructed not to bring a great deal with us, but one thing that will be with me is your photograph.

I know telling you not to worry would be senseless, but at least try not to dwell on it. There are always things in life beyond our control, but I believe that I will be where I can do the most good for our country.

With love,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

August 19, 1914

My dearest Alexander,

Your enlistment has not taken me by surprise. I could not truly imagine you sitting on the sidelines during these troubled times. I am glad to hear that you will be taking the officer training. I would have to think that the qualities I know you to have are the sort that an officer needs. I cannot find the words to express what knowing you plan to keep my photograph with you means to me.

That reminds me that I received a letter from dear Lawrence. He plans to be enlisting himself, but is taking the advice of a friend of his that is already an officer in the British Army and holding off for a bit. I'm not sure exactly what the reasoning is behind that advice, but considering where Lawrence is and the various projects he's been involved in, it will probably take him a few weeks to get everything settled enough that he would be able to leave to enlist without leaving a horrid mess behind.

Lawrence seems somewhat concerned about how safe my school may or may not be as the war escalates - which he seems convinced that it will - but also admits that he would be hard pressed to think of any where that might be any safer while still remaining in the European area. He also expressed his concern over you and was wondering where you were and what your plans are. I will leave that to you to write to him about, though I hope you do not mind that I did write to him and sent him your new address.

Little Viveka is inconsolable these days and she has been dampening dear Ermengarde's shoulder
every evening. Her fears have come true to a larger degree than even she had imagined. Not only have both of her elder brothers enlisted, but so has her father. Her father is apparently also quite adamant that Viveka remain here at the school for the duration of the war. Unlike Lawrence, he seems convinced that all will be resolved by the end of the year. While I do admire his optimism, I fear Lawrence's views about how the war will go are more realistic.

For the time being, I know of no plans to remove me from the school. Which I think is the right decision at the point as I plan to throw myself into my studies to try and keep from fretting too much. I shall try to maintain some sort of equilibrium. I certainly have no intention of delivering the Roman ultimatum to you of coming home carrying your shield or upon it. Yet I must admit that requesting someone to be careful during a time of war sounds trite as well. I suppose that the best I can do is to repeat your own words back to you - keep your eyes and ears open.

All my love always,

Millicent

From: Thun, Switzerland

September 15, 1914

My dearest Alexander,

Things are growing evermore chaotic here at the school. I do not know what past circumstances might have occurred during the younger days of our headmistress, but she seems almost dangerously obsessed with the notion that military forces might take over our area. While I will admit a little preparedness in case of an emergency is wise, she is taking everything to an extreme that is not doing any good for the more nervous of the girls attending here.

One of our older instructors here, Miss Nanina, is taking what one of the other girls refers to as a 'what happens, happens' attitude. She pays attention, yet doesn't dwell on what she cannot alter herself. I'm torn a bit. On one hand, that does seem rather sensible. On the other hand, it seems too passive. I suppose that is more due to my own temperament than any fault in Miss Nanina's stance.

In our history class, it was pointed out that when English forces engage with enemy forces on the continent, it will be the first time that English forces have done so since the Battle of Waterloo ninety-nine years ago. That one turned out well for our forces and I hope that precedent continues.

I suppose that the first engagement between forces has most likely already occurred and news of it simply has not reached us. I am not sure whether the time it takes for news to travel is a blessing or a curse. Good news coming quicker would certainly be welcomed, but would bad news doing the same be equally welcome? It isn't as if the news will change regardless of the time it takes to reach its destination.

Of course, as soon as I write that, I recall Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet where the speed of bad news and the lagging of good news causes the deaths of three people, including Romeo and Juliet themselves. So I suppose that even though that is a rather dramatic example of the consequences, the speed can indeed make a difference.

I hope you are well wherever you are when this letter finds its' way to you. If there is anything that you or your fellows might find that you need or want, please let me know and I will do whatever I can. While I might not be a miracle worker by any stretch of imagination, I do flatter myself into thinking that I can be a rather determined individual when I put my mind to a task. Or in my mother's
less flattering terms, stubborn.

Ermengarde sends her good wishes to you as well reminds me that she and I have organ practice to attend. I have no hopes to become an organist (or desire to, might I add), but I do want to get past this class, so wish me luck. I am certain my instructress will wish for a thick pair of earmuffs - I can manage to carry a tune well while singing, but my fingers and keyboards seem to work at cross-purposes.

All my love always,

Millicent

From : Thun, Switzerland

October 12, 1914

My dearest Alexander,

In case his own letters to you have yet to reach their destination, I have heard from Lawrence. He is enlisting this month and will be commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army. He is somewhere in the southern Mediterranean area, which of course makes sense with his particular talents. In other news from him, he is well, but has less hope daily of there being a swift end to conflict. From all I have been able to read, I fear he is correct. One can't heap fuel in an enormous pile and then act surprised at the size of the fire when someone finally sets it ablaze.

As you will hopefully find, this letter has accompanied your Christmas present. Since I have yet to hear from you, I have no way to judge the speed (or lack thereof) that my letters manage to reach you. I have been told once again that I am being quite forward and likely rather wanton as well to send you warm clothing of an intimate nature, but I will take Lawrence's advice over theirs in nearly every instance I can think of. As I was not able to consult with you in advance, I can only hope that your opinion of the gift is similar to Lawrence's. There is a packet of the pipe tobacco that you mentioned with fondness enclosed as well, so perhaps at least part of the gift will be welcomed.

My darling Ermengarde has been quite the mother hen to the younger students here. You would think that the instructors here would become more maternal in the face of outside strife, but such has not proven to be the case. When I ventured that opinion to Analiese - one of the senior girls here - she rather rolled her eyes at me and stated that if our instructors had maternal longings, they would not be 'old maids teaching young maids'. A bit of a crass way to say it, but I must confess that she does seem to have a point. Lawrence shows more maternal concern that the majority of the staff here. There are, of course, a few exceptions, but there are not enough of them to go around nor do they have unlimited time to devote to comforting. If maternal inclinations do indicate how one would enjoy motherhood, Ermengarde should wed a man that loves her dearly with the financial means to support a large brood.

I am somewhere in-between myself. While I do comfort some of the younger girls on occasion, I think I am looked on by them more as an elder sister than as a motherly sort. Which suits me quite well as I am not ready for motherhood even on a surrogate basis. Ermengarde can gather all the chicks she likes under her wings - I shall not be competing with her for their attention.

My lessons are going well, though several classes are being cancelled and replaced by others. Our headmistress is being very insistent on languages now and we have to study at least one of each side of the conflict in addition to whichever language is our native tongue. Lessons that take place outside of the confines of our school yard are all gone for the duration of the conflict as well.
Of course, the language lessons don't bother me in the least as I do enjoy them. Ermengarde, however, is of the opinion that the world would be best served if everyone would just learn English and cannot fathom my love of languages in the slightest. Perhaps it was because I was exposed to so many languages from a young age that makes the difference. Perhaps not. Dear as Ermengarde is to me, I cannot deny that she and I will never see eye to eye on such things as languages and literature.

I miss you very much. Both your conversation and the ease that even silence has between us. I had read about companionable silence in a book once, but had never experienced it until we met. I try every night before retiring to take a look toward our star. I know that it is a silly fancy that such a thing makes me feel closer to you, but I strive to be serious in so many other ways that I think I am entitled to a bit of silliness in my life.

All of my love always,

Millicent

From : Thun, Switzerland

November 4, 1914

Dear Mister Waverly,

Please forgive my forwardness in writing to you and my intrusion into Millicent's things to find your address. I know that Millicent promised to write to you every month, but she is currently unable to do so. I only hope that neither of you will be cross that I am filling the gap. I wish that I could consult with her, but I am not permitted to speak with her, so if she is angry, I suppose I shall simply have to apologize afterward.

On one hand, I do not want to worry you as I know from Millicent that you are now in the horrid war that has begun. On the other hand, Millicent is very faithful to her word and I fear that you would worry more if the letters stopped altogether than if you knew what was going on.

I suppose I should get straight to the point. Millicent and four other of our ladies here are under quarantine for Scarlet Fever. Hardly any word comes to us from the ladies who are isolated and, of course, no writing materials are allowed out that might carry the germs. I was able to speak with one of the women who are tending the invalids this morning and inquire about Millicent. The woman, she refers to herself as Nurse Cassandra, says that Millicent is doing as well as one could reasonably expect - whatever that actually means. She is apparently handling her convalescence well. The nurse said her only request was a slight adjustment of her bed so that she could view the stars at night.

I understand that, in all, she and the others will need to remain in quarantine for six weeks. This is her second week in, so at least they should be released by Christmas. I wish I could send some of her things in to her to read, but anything that enters that area will have to be burnt. She may or may not be angry at me for telling you of her illness, but she would be furious with me if I caused any of her things to be incinerated.

I expect that the December letter will once more be from Millicent, so I will end this with what I know is her hopes as well as mine for the continued health of you and your fellow soldiers.

With regards,

Ermengarde Breckenridge
November 28, 1914

Dear Miss Breckenridge,

I appreciate very much that you risked Millicent's wrath and took it upon yourself to write to me about her illness. You are quite right about how staunch she is regarding her promises. I would have worried far more about the lack of a letter than I do in knowing the actual circumstances.

My comrades and I have been given a brief time here to rest and I am using my time to send out Millicent's parcel for Christmas out along with this letter and parcel to you. I hope you are not insulted that I have sent you a small token of how much I appreciate you being there for Millicent when I cannot be.

May the holidays find you safe and well.

Kindest regards,

Alexander Waverly

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November 28, 1914

My darling Millicent,

First of all, please don't be too angry with Ermengarde. I believe I am as acquainted as well as anyone alive as to how you feel about your privacy, but I would far rather know when something is wrong than have a blank space to fill in with my own thoughts. With the sights I am often exposed to in recent days, those thoughts rarely turn toward happier conjectures.

Of course, I am certain that you would have told me of your aliment yourself, but being in quarantine prevented that. You have never shied away from an unpleasant topic in the past. I trust that you are feeling better by the time this arrives and hopes that you will be recovered enough to enjoy your Christmas holiday. What I have sent is not much, but I hope that it is something that you would care to have.

Have they located what caused the disease to break out at your school? I trust they are using all available resources to insure that another outbreak doesn't occur. I will confess to a bad moment when I found out that you were ill. While I do know that you are a strong individual where will is concerned, your build is so slight that I cannot help but think of you as delicate - all other evidence to the contrary.

Without saying too much of where we are or what we are encountering, I think I and my fellows are all of the firm opinion that those who have glamorized depictions of war in the past have either never been involved in a conflict against their fellow man or sustained a blow to the head that altered their memories. It is a messy, noisy and altogether undignified in every aspect imaginable. Not that I don't agree with our purpose for being here. What standing can any country have in the world if it will not honour the treaties it has willingly signed? Still, I cannot help but think that if a few had undertaken an earlier intervention into the problem, so many men would not be in the field now, so far away from their homes and loved ones.

I now have to agree with Lawrence's assessment. Things have brewed so long that it will take
beyond the end of this year to relieve the pressures. To be truthful, probably to the end of next year at least. Our current commanding officer has likened it to a boil that must be lanced before it can begin to heal. We have not reached the lancing stage yet.

Time is short to do the things I need to do before we must move again, so I will sign off for now. Never think that drawing comfort from the stars is childish or else consider that I am as childish in that regard as you are. I am looking at them even as I write this. At least the stars are not so changeable as Juliet accused the moon of being when Romeo tried to swear on it.

With all my love,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland
December 25, 1914

My dearest Alexander,

I am finally free of that horrid isolation ward, but I must be truthful and say that I still haven't gotten my strength back. We ended up having to remain in quarantine longer than expected as one of the young ladies suffering developed rheumatic fever. It was too much for the poor thing and her body simply gave out on her. The rest of us were fortunate enough not to develop the rheumatic fever, but I can understand why they required us to spend an additional two weeks in isolation to assure themselves that none of us did.

The doctor over our case told me that what originally made the five of us ill was improperly pasteurized milk. It seems unbearably cruel that Meredith is dead over something that could have so easily been prevented by something as simple as heating milk. I certainly won't be inclined to tease Ermengarde any longer about her habit of only drinking scalded milk.

On to other topics. I am not cross with Ermengarde for writing you when I was unable to do so myself. I would certainly want to know if you were ill, so I cannot expect for you to inform me if I keep similar things hidden. Of course, I was not deliberately keeping anything from you. By the time that I knew something was wrong, I was in quarantine. A situation I sincerely hope to never find myself in again. Feeling terribly ill while surrounded by others equally as ill and with not a thing to do but to dwell on those feelings? When my mind was clear enough to think, I was bored out of my mind.

I was so pleased to see the package waiting on me and I opened it at midnight by the window. The picture of you in uniform is something that I wanted very much, but was uncertain of how to request it. I am so sorry for the brevity of this, but I am assured that my stamina will return by leaps and bounds now that I am up to eating things more substantial than broths and jellies. Fates willing, I shall write you again on New Year's Day. Be well.

As always, all my love,

Millicent

From : 28th County of London Battalion
December 31, 1914
My darling Millicent,

There are only minutes left to this year and until the arrival of your fifteenth birthday. Happy New Year and a happier birthday to you. I am sorry that circumstances have not allowed me to find something that I would have considered more appropriate for your birthday, but I hope it is something you might like regardless.

I am very glad to hear that you are getting better. As hard as it is not to rush things, try to take things slowly and allow your strength to build back gradually. Of course, had you ever seen me ill myself, you would know that I am far better as issuing this sort of good advice than I am about following it myself.

Please never concern yourself with the length of your letters. They are greatly welcomed regardless and I hope you do not mind brief letters either. Neither time for writing and writing materials are not easily found.

My pocket watch tells me that midnight has arrived and the clouds have parted enough for our star to peep out. I pray for you to continue to grow well and strong. I also pray for this war to be over by the end of this new year given to us.

As a final note, your present to me is keeping me pleasantly warm on this very cold night, so thank you very much once again.

With all my love,

Alexander
From: Thun, Switzerland

January 1, 1915

My dearest Alexander,

Another year older, I am not sure about the wiser part, but perhaps that only applies to those who have already reached their majority.

At least I have now reached an age I am not embarrassed to admit to being. When I was under the age of ten, I recall that having to admit to it rather felt like I was admitting to a character flaw. Worse, a flaw that could not be corrected except by passage of time.

Speaking of time, at least I was able to make use of my recuperation time to catch up on the reading parts of my studies. Illness or not, the semi-annual testing waits for no-one, so I suppose I shall see just how well I have been able to catch up when they begin.

The war news, or rather the lack of it, is rather getting on my nerves. I have sent a letter to my guardian and begged her to send me the papers. I know they will not hold any real detail either, but anything would be more than the attitude of the school which seems to be panic in preparation and then pretend nothing untoward is going on outside of our school walls. Of course I know that nothing will be accomplished by us dwelling on the war, but I cannot help but chafe at being kept in ignorance. Despite the saying, I for one do not consider it bliss.

I have graduated back to a relatively normal diet. I say relatively because they are having me avoid spicier fare for now, but by month's end, I should be able to eat anything I like once more. I've regained a bit of the weight that I lost, enough so that Ermengarde has pronounced that I no longer look like a pitiful, homeless waif. They cut the hair of all of us that were in quarantine rather short to make caring for us easier. What this means for me is that my head is a literal mass of unruly curls that I fear make me look rather boyish. A cute boy perhaps, but a boy nonetheless.

I cannot wait for the weather to clear during the day. I never knew how much I could pine for a ray of sunshine. I hope the weather is kinder to you wherever you are.

You are often in my thoughts and always in my prayers.

All my love to you always,

Millicent

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From: 28th County of London Battalion

February 1, 1915

My darling Millicent,

To give you an idea of how mail is currently traveling, your last letter to me arrived only three days ago. I was very relieved to hear that your health has improved so much. I wouldn't fret overmuch
about your hair, my dear girl. Despite the tendency of your Drama Instructress to assign you masculine roles, there is nothing boyish about you.

I fear I must report that the weather where I am is every bit as dismal as the weather that you have been dealing with. An hour of sunlight would indeed be most welcome at this point. The constant damp has caused a few health problems among the other lads, but I have been fortunate in that regard so far. The socks that were included in the package that you sent me for Christmas take a great deal of credit for that. I hope that you never have the opportunity to see the end results of the failure to keep feet properly dry, but the condition that the medics here refer to as trench foot is a very seriously matter. Some of the lads have even lost toes to it and all of this damp is to blame.

That isn't a very cheery image for you, I'm sure, but it is a very real concern out here. The weather is every bit as much of an enemy as the opposition's troops are.

Even though I am in the midst of the war effort, I find myself as hungry for actual news on it as you do. I suppose that means you and I share a mutual dislike of being in the dark regarding matters of high significance. I do understand that too much knowledge out to the general public might cause a panic though.

I must sign off now if I am to get this letter to the clerk in time for it to leave with our dispatches. I trust that your health will continue to improve. You are often in my thoughts, especially when the stars are out at night.

All my love,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

February 17, 1915

My dearest Alexander,

With the mail situation seeming to be destined to be rather unpredictable, I shall continue to write you once a month rather than wait for your letters to arrive as I should hate for you to go for a long period without a letter in case one manages to get lost.

My guardian has answered my request and I now get a packet with a week’s worth of newspapers on a regular basis. I am not sure what sort of access to newspapers that you have yourself. They would be old news by the time they reached you, but would you care to have me forward them along to you once I have finished with them?

Things are going to be in a bit of a tizzy here. Ermengarde's father has written her that he is going to remarry. He and his fiancé will be coming the first week of March so that Ermengarde can meet the lady. Knowing her, I think you can imagine the state that the dear girl is getting herself worked into. She is worried about everything from if her new step-mother will like her to whether she'll approve of how her lessons have progressed. The amount of distress she is undergoing makes me a bit glad that my mother avoided marrying after I came along.

I am feeling much better than I did a month ago and the doctor had released me from further diet restrictions. I honestly do not know that I shall ever have the same liking for milk that I once had though. The headmistress has forbidden the kitchen from serving any of us 'raw' milk after that incident, so we will be having scalded milk or milk cooked into puddings for the foreseeable future.
The sun actually shone for an hour yesterday. It was easy enough to see that I was not the only one to have missed it. Our instructors put all classes on hold so the we might grab our wraps and go out into the sunlight for as long as it lasted. It boosted everyone's mood wonderfully. Well, except for Lavinia. I do swear that she could find fault if someone were to deposit a treasure chest at her feet.

I plan to send along your birthday present with my letter next month. I thought I would mention it here so that you would know to look out for it. I am going to keep to practical things as I know you have to carry everything about with you. I am still exchanging letters with Lawrence as well, but I have not heard from him since the beginning of the year. I hope that is only the mail again and that everything is well with him.

Ermengarde has noticed that I am writing and called across to send you her good wishes - followed by her fretting about the state of her clothes. Poor dear has gone through a major growth spurt. We took her measurements earlier and she is a full four inches taller than she was last year. Needless to say, all of her dresses really do need to be let down, but with the exception of one or two of her skirts, they are already let down as far as they can be. Her father is simply going to have to face facts and have some serviceable dresses made for her. It is not as if she has been careless with her clothing, after all.

I haven't really grown much in height myself. I begin to wonder if being ill when I was will affect how tall I shall end up being, but then again, my mother was not what one would call terribly tall herself. One of those things that I suppose I should not bother to worry about since there is precious little I can do about it.

As I have just been kindly reminded that it is nearly time for our evening meal, I shall finish this off so that I may put it into the basket with the mail to go out in the morning. You are ever in my thoughts and prayers.

All of my love always,

Millicent

From: Thun, Switzerland

March 9, 1915

My dearest Alexander,

I am at a total loss. I do believe that Lord Breckenridge has lost his mind and cannot for the life of me fathom how to even begin to comfort Ermengarde through her current dilemma. Let me stop here and go back to where this began as I have rather gone right into the midst of a situation you know nothing about.

I do believe that I wrote to you that Ermengarde's father had written her that he is going to remarry. Well, as expected, Lord Breckenridge came to the school and I happened to be in Ermengarde's company when he arrived. He had with him a young lady the same age as the last year boarders here, so Ermengarde's first thought (and mine as well) was that the young woman was the daughter of the lady Lord Breckenridge intended to marry. The thought delighted Ermengarde as she has always wished for a sister.

You can possibly imagine our shock when we found out that the young woman was actually Lord Breckenridge's fiancé. It is not a case of her looking younger than her years either. The lady, Winifred Bastow, is barely two years older than Ermengarde. Needless to say, my dear Ermengarde
is not going likely to have any sort of a normal mother/daughter relationship with her, but Lord Breckenridge seems to consider that it is the most natural thing in the world and is already talking of future sons. He has never made secret of the fact that he was highly disappointed that Ermengarde was not a boy, so all of this makes her feel as if her father has taken the final steps to replace her.

I wish I could think of the proper way (or any other way) to help her because, quite frankly, it sounds to me as if he is trying to replace her as well. It is a shame he is marrying Winifred instead of adopting her because as a slightly older sister, I think she might do Ermengarde a world of good. As it is, I suppose I must now hope that Lord Breckenridge doesn't forbid Ermengarde to remain in touch with me. I know I did a poor job in hiding my shock. He is bound to have noticed.

The only positive I can come up with is that Ermengarde is already of age to marry with her father's consent and in just over a year will not even need that.

Looking back over this, I am so sorry - I rather went off on a bit of a rant. There really isn't anyone here that I can discuss any of this with and it simply had to come out. Enough on that and on to other topics.

I hope the packet I sent arrived intact. I have again scandalized Ermengarde by sending you 'intimate apparel' - honestly, how intimate can socks and towels be considered? I am not against modesty, but that seems a bit much.

Beyond the socks and towels, I have sent some pipe tobacco and a packet of hard candies. I had considered something like toffees but I was afraid they would melt by the time they reached you and you would end up with toffee covered socks. Hard to think that warmer weather will soon be on top of us. If there is anything that I can send along that might be of any use, please do let me know. I am afraid that my imagination only goes so far in trying to think of what would be helpful versus what would be in your way.

As for my health, I think I feel as well now as I ever have. The only oddity is that my sleep schedule seems to have gone off, but I believe I have adjusted to the new routine. I am writing this in early morning so that I can place it in the mail on my way to breakfast, so I will sign off for now. You remain ever in my thoughts and prayers.

My love to you always,

Millicent

From : 28th County of London Battalion

April 2, 1915

My darling Millicent,

This letter will be brief as we are on the move. Our commander has given everyone a brief period to write notes home as he does not know when we might again have an opportunity.

Your packet arrived and do ignore Ermengarde's tender feelings on what is appropriate to send to me here. The items were welcomed and already in usage. I shared the hard candies around with the other lads and I must say that you have boosted the morale of many other than myself. As to what would be of use here? Hard candies, fresh socks, packets of tea, tobacco - anything in those realms are always welcome and always in short supply.

I wish I could adequately tell you what your letters mean to me. I am often given envious glances during our sporadic mail calls. Some poor lads have not gotten a single piece of mail since being
called up. With the newspapers, I would prefer not to read more war news, but if you find any interesting stories, please send along clippings. Not only would I enjoy reading them, but I could pass them along to the other lads as well.

There is the signal for us to wrap things up. I rest easier at night now knowing that your health has been restored. Keep safe and keep well.

All my love,

Alexander

From: Thun, Switzerland

April 21, 1915

My dearest Alexander,

First, since I am writing this on your birthday, I hope that the circumstance you and your battalion are in allowed you to at least enjoy a quiet period and decent weather on your twenty-third birthday. I received a present myself in the form of your letter arriving yesterday. I am so pleased that everything got to you in good condition.

Ermengarde noticed that I fell quiet while reading your letter and finally asked me if you were still in good health. I assured her that you hadn't mentioned anything about illness, but confessed that I was thinking about those poor fellows you mentioned, so far from any comforts of home and without so much as a postcard to cheer them.

Darling Ermengarde immediately decided that wouldn't do at all and was chattering all the way to the dining hall as we went to lunch about recruiting some of our fellow students and asking them to write to those men who didn't have anyone to exchange letters with. Little Viveka overheard her and demanded to be one of the writers. Ermengarde cleared it with our Headmistress after lunch, so there will be several letters coming along with this one. I don't know what it will do for morale there, but both Viveka and Ermengarde seem happy to have something else to concentrate on beyond the problems of their own families.

I've also scoured the recent newspapers for clippings that I hope will be of passing interest. As much as I know you love to read, being without access to books and newspapers must be an ongoing hardship.

Since you have asked me to tell you about the goings on here, I must tell you that I have expanded my circle of intimates to include Miss Arabella Wainwright and Miss Chiarina Poletti. The three of us were stuck in that horrid isolation room together and with little else we could do but talk, we became well acquainted. The other young lady that survived the bout of Scarlet Fever was pulled from the school by her father as soon as she was freed from the quarantine. Since the food supplied to the school was directly to blame, I cannot say that I blame her family for choosing to enroll her elsewhere. My own dear guardian made inquiries to me if I wish to transfer to another school as well, but as this one has taken steps to insure there is not a repeat occurrence, I hardly see where it is necessary. Besides, despite Lavinia, I do rather enjoy my studies here.

Why couldn't Lavinia have been the one that transferred to another school? Heaven knows she has screeched enough about having to still attend classes with me and the other 'carriers of disease'. She has not a sympathetic bone in her body. She even yelled at little Viveka for crying over one of her brothers being wounded. His wound was thankfully not serious, but honestly, screaming at an
already upset eight year old certainly did not do anyone any favors.

I will be losing the company of my dear Ermengarde for most of the month of June. That is the month her father plans to remarry and he wants her back at the family home to assist in the preparations. My poor darling is not adjusting to this coming change at all. Not that I can really see how she could. She was sniffing back tears when she showed me her father's latest letter in which he referred to Winifred as 'your future mother'. Does he honestly expect his seventeen year old daughter to call his nineteen year old bride 'mother'? No offense meant to you, Alexander, but I find many men to be quite incomprehensible.

I have left this following part to be towards the last as I know you will worry. I have heard from Lawrence again. He is well, but he is involved in a project that may again involve my traveling away from the school for a short time. My guardian has not approved it yet as she considers it is far too soon since my illness, but I believe that she will give in to what our uncles back in London want. I haven’t even mentioned the possibility to Ermengarde yet as she is already in enough of a state without my adding to it.

Looking to my calendar, I see it has been eight months now since your enlistment. It seems so much longer somehow. I suppose it must seem even longer to you and I apologize in advance if it turns out that I will be traveling as that will likely interfere with my letter writing until it is concluded. Now that I think of it, if there is a list of soldiers that would like to continue receiving mail from the school, please send that list to Ermengarde. I know she will see to it that the list is distributed before she leaves in June.

I wished you a very happy birthday on our star last night and will do so again tonight. I look forward to the day that I may once again give you my good wishes to your face. As ever, I pray for your continued health and safety.

All my love always,

Millicent

From : Cairo, Egypt

May 15, 1915

Alexander,

Been a good while since I last dropped a note off to you, old boy. Your dear Millicent is still here with me. My apologies as I had hoped to have sent her packing back off the Switzerland by now.

It's a bit selfish on my part, but I have to tell you that I don't know when I have been more grateful for the presence of another human being more than I have been grateful for your girl. We were in the process of working out a translation when the word arrived that my baby brother, Frank, was killed in action on the Western Front back on the ninth. I am told it happened at the Battle of Festubert in Richebourg l'Avou and that he and the other lads that died were buried near an old orchard there. I pray that I will somehow be able to locate it when this horrid war comes to an end.

I must admit that the news rather tore me up. Silly of me with all the first hand knowledge you and I both have of the toll in lives that this war is exacting, but somehow? Somehow in my mind, I had it that if one of us fell in battle, it would be me as the elder. Millicent was a brick, an absolute brick. She didn't try to make me talk, but she would sit and listen without saying a word if I did start talking. She made sure I had things to eat and drink, then she'd go back to working on translations.
Basically let me have the time and space that I needed to pull myself back together while still giving me the knowledge that there was someone there nearby for me if I needed her. I cannot tell you how much that meant to me and I am unsure of how I could ever properly thank her.

There is a great deal I wish I could talk over with you that I know you would both understand as well as likely shed new light on, but the mails are not as secure as we might wish, so I realize that it simply cannot be done. Perhaps when this is all over, we can all meet and tip a few pints. Well, you and I can handle the pints. I don't believe Millicent seems the type to indulge.

She has asked me to convey her best wishes to you. The commander here is a bit of a stiff and has forbidden her to send out any letters of her own while she is here. I think part of it is his nerves about having the responsibility for a young woman present here, especially a young woman who is the ward of one of Her Majesty's ladies in waiting.

Never mind him, I plan to keep a watchful eye on Millicent. Did I ever mention to you that she's only four months older than my brother, Arnold? Or Arnie, as we call him in the family. Of course, he calls me Ned, so I suppose he gets his revenge on me that way. Getting sidetracked, but what I meant to say is that she's rather become like a little sister to me and I will look after her as one. The fact that you would likely abandon your post in order to come over here and kick my arse should anything happen to her has nothing to do with it.

Keep your feet and powder dry and your head down.

T.E.L.

From : 28th County of London Battalion

June 2, 1915

Lawrence,

Let me begin by offering you my most heartfelt condolences on the loss of your brother, Frank. I can well imagine that Millicent was a comfort as you came to terms with the news. She has a very sympathetic soul from her own loss.

For all that I am glad that Millicent was there with you when you were in need, that still does not prevent me from hoping that, by the time this letter reaches your hands, she is back at her school in Switzerland. Yes, she has skills that are apparently needed and the nerve, but I do believe those back in London tend to conveniently forget her age.

I suppose it is a bit odd that I've gotten into the habit of calling you by your last name, but I cannot imagine calling you 'Ned'. You have never objected, but if it does bother you that I call you Lawrence, just tell me the mode of address you would prefer and I will alter to using it.

As you yourself mentioned, there are many things that I wish I could talk to you about, but, God willing, I will look forward to our meeting again after the war. I fear that will not be anytime this year, but perhaps things will look more optimistic next year. So long as she has a beverage of her own preference, I don't believe Millicent will begrudge the two of us lifting a pint or two.

If circumstances have it that Millicent is still with you, give her my best and tell her that I have a letter for her that I am occasionally adding to that I will keep with me until I know that she has returned to the school. Even though Millicent's guardian was quite explicit in her instructions to the Headmistress, I still do not trust the woman to keep her fingers out of a letter if it has been sitting for too long. The woman has a sordid imagination. I suspect the Headmistress of spending more of her
time reading penny dreadfuls than Ovid.

We are rationed on lighting at the moment so I will finish before lights out. I am endeavoring to keep my head down and powder dry. Your injunction regarding dry feet is, alas, a hard goal to meet.

Keep a low profile yourself, Lawrence. I'm holding you to that meeting and I'll even cover the first round.

Alexander
1915 - July thru December

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

From: Thun, Switzerland

July 2, 1915

My dearest Alexander,

I apologize that this will be a short note. I have just arrived back at school this morning and I am admittedly very weary. Dear Ermengarde returned to school at the end of June and went into a near panic that I had not returned yet, so what little energy I did have remaining has gone into getting her to settle back down.

As you may guess by the date, I spent more time away from school that was originally estimated. I am told that my guardian was highly displeased and only her very adamant demands enabled me to return even this soon. I had never given any real contemplation before as to just how few people outside of my mother's homeland can actually both speak and read the language.

The wedding seems to have taken a great deal out of Ermengarde, but perhaps that it merely the combination of the wedding, the trip back from England and fretting over me. I will admit to a few times along the way that I felt true apprehension about the area I was traveling through and I saw a few scenes of what I can only call total devastation. I suppose it is rather selfish of me to hope that I will not have to depart the school again until the war is over.

There is, of course, not much that I can say about my trip beyond that it was very nice to be able to spend time with Lawrence again. Had the Fates (and my mother) granted me a brother, I like to imagine that he would have been like Lawrence. I am sure you have heard from him about his loss. It seems especially tragic when it happens to one as young as Frank was.

One thing about being back at school is the delightful coolness. Lawrence never mentioned how terribly hot it gets there. One day, the thermometer in the shade outside of his office read 117 degrees and it only goes down by about 20 degrees after the sun sets. I believe I will take advantage of a long bath followed by a long sleep on clean sheets.

As always, you are in my thoughts and prayers,

Millicent

PS - I simply had to add this once I finished bathing. I left this letter sitting out while attending to my personal needs at which time Ermengarde got a bit nosey and read it. I have once again scandalized her by mentioning such things as a bath and clean sheets in a letter to an unmarried man. At least being shocked over my behavior gives her something else to dwell on, but if she thinks I am going to be foregoing sleep to listen to a lecture, she is very much mistaken.

From: 28th County of London Battalion

August 7, 1915
My darling Millicent,

Your wish to remain at the school until the end of this war is hardly selfish. I consider it more in the line of good, common sense and I add my hopes that you are able to stay there to your own. I've looked over the random notes I had jotted down while you were away from school and decided just to include them with this letter. It wasn't until I re-read over them that I realized just how widely my thoughts will wander at times, but I did say I would include them and so I have.

When I received your letter, I reviewed over the one that Lawrence sent me while you were still in Egypt. I don't know if you truly realize how grateful he was for your presence there when he learned of his brother's death. While I admittedly worried over your welfare there, I am glad that you were able to be a rock for him when he needed it.

I occasionally suspect that you enjoy scandalizing Ermengarde. Not that it seems you need to try terribly hard. Modesty is an admirable trait to an extent, but she does seem to have it in the extreme. I think the way that the world is shifting will make life more difficult for young women of Ermengarde's delicate nature once this war has come to a close. Perhaps it is just as well that you are scandalizing her in small ways. It may better prepare her for life outside of the school walls than all of her other lessons combined.

I cannot, of course, tell you where we are or what actions are taking place, however I must say that the amount of blood that has been and continues to be shed in order to hold onto or to gain a few feet of ground is staggering. I have seen sights that I will never be able to forget and I cannot help but feel that there must have been some way that all of this could have been averted or at least lessened. Something I hope to have the opportunity to contemplate once this war has come to its end. And it will end, my dear girl. Just not soon enough.

Please take good care of yourself, my dear. You are a beacon of light in this murk all about me.

All my love,

Alexander

From: Thun, Switzerland

September 19, 1915

My dearest Alexander,

I know how precious little either of us can affect what the world does around us and, at times, that makes me feel a combination of anger and despair. I received the latest batch of newspapers from my guardian and learned of the sinking of the HMT Royal Edward in the Aegean Sea last month with what is said to have been a large loss of life. I know this is a war and that in war, cruel things happen, but to torpedo a ship that has no attack capabilities seems particularly cowardly. Initial reports were that only 600 out of the 1600 aboard were able to be saved.

I do my best not to worry too much about you, but I suppose being with dear Lawrence and helping him through his bereavement has my thoughts in a maudlin turn, for which I do apologize. I do remember your admonition to me to not be afraid to speak my true thoughts to you or I would likely toss this page into the fire. I do understand what you meant and hope you remember that same admonition when you write to me. That old saying of troubles shared becoming halved and all.

Speaking of troubles, dear Ermengarde is beside herself. Her father's new wife (I find I cannot refer to her as Ermengarde's mother) is with child and her father is considering ending her studies here to
take her back home as a nanny for the new child. At least no decision will be made until the end of this year of schooling, but with Ermengarde so close to completing her classes, it seems her father is putting very little genuine consideration to her future. Having her become the caretaker of a younger brother or sister would remove her from society at the time when it would be most likely for her to be courted. I know Ermengarde's problems are but a tempest in a teapot compared to the war, but the war will end someday end and life will continue afterward.

I forgot to mention that I received a brief letter from Lawrence. The tone is so somber, it is almost as if he has aged between this letter and the one prior to it. I know that part of it is that he feels guilt over poor Frank's death. He seems to feel as if he is in a safe location while his brother was put into the thick of it. I did my best to point out that neither he nor his brother were in control of his posting but I fear that I really did not manage to get through to him. Perhaps when that day comes when we all get together after the war, you will have more luck than I. I hope so because that is a heavy burden for him to bear.

A knock on the door has informed me that the Head Mistress is calling us all together for some sort of announcement, so I will sign off for now and slip this into the outgoing mail on my way. My thoughts and prayers are with you, as ever.

All my love,

Millicent

From : 28th County of London Battalion
October 21, 1915

My darling Millicent,

I fear I must make this letter very short. Things are not good where I am currently, but rest assured that I myself am still in decent health. The flies which have been plaguing us are less now that the weather is getting cooler. I will not have the time to write another letter, so please convey my regards to Lawrence when you write to him next.

Pray for those of us here, my dear. I will write again as soon as I am able, even if just a line to let you know I'm alright.

All my love,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland
October 31, 1915

My dearest Alexander,

It is All Hallows Eve and the sun has just set here as I sit at my desk writing before we are called to supper. I haven't had a letter from you since the one you sent in August. Please understand that I am not saying that to fuss, but just to let you know what the last news was that I had from you. The headmistress says the mail service will likely get far worse before it gets better, so I expect this will be that state of things until the end of the war.
We have been told that Swiss troops have been stationed at the borders to prevent the trench warfare from spilling into this country. How long they can maintain their neutral stance is something I cannot help but question. I cannot understand it myself, but then, as you are aware, I am not of a lukewarm nature. Perhaps I will not always be wise enough to pick the correct side of a conflict, but I cannot imagine not picking any side.

Speaking of the headmistress, she has taken to spending a day a week in Berne - as you may recall, we are a bit over an hour away by horse carriage. She occasionally speaks to the older girls about a 'wonderful speaker' she has become acquainted with named Vladimir Lenin and his wife, Nadya. I am keeping it to myself that I met the two of them and cannot say that either myself or my dear mother cared for them. I was eight at the time and it was late spring. I recall that as it was the same timeframe that mother was doing the first performances of what soon became her favorite dances.

I am straying from my subject, but my main recollection of Mister Lenin was that he had an intensity that rather frightened me at that age. His wife was a very severe woman as well. I cannot recall seeing her smile. I wish I could recall more of what my mother said about them, but though I have been racking my brain, I cannot bring anything to mind beyond the fact that she did not care for them. It gives me a disquieting feeling that the headmistress seems so taken with them.

This parcel is small, but I hope the gloves and socks will give some small comfort as winter approaches again. I pray nightly for your continued health. Looking upward at our star gives me some comfort, but selfish as it is, I also pray for this war to end soon so that we can see one another face to face once more.

All my love to you always,

Millicent

From : Thun, Switzerland

November 14, 1915

Dear Lawrence,

I trust this letter will find you in good health. I received a letter today from Alexander and he requested that I send his regards to you as he was unable to write multiple letters at that time.

Please do write if time permits. I know that where you are, squeezing in time for social matters must fall behind all of your other obligations, so if all you can drop is a line on a postcard now and again to let me know that all is well, I would greatly appreciate it. Alexander has given me orders not to fret, but I cannot help but have my thoughts turn to how you and he are doing.

I wish I had a tutor in Arabic here or at least someone else that could speak it so that I can keep in practice with what little I have already learned. I hope once things have settled after the war that I can take the study of it back up again. My roommate cannot understand in the least the fascination I have for languages. She is convinced that everyone should simply speak what she refers to as 'sensible English'. With as many root languages as our mother tongue has sprung from, sensible is not the word I would use to describe it.

Do take care of yourself. I intend to keep you and Alexander to your promises to meet once the war is over.

With fondest regards,
From : Thun, Switzerland

November 15, 1915

My dearest Alexander,

I shall have to keep this short to get it into the mail basket before classes, but I wanted to let you know that your letter from October 21st arrived yesterday. I used my allotted time for correspondence to read it and to send a quick letter to Lawrence. I sent him your regards as you requested.

They may be crushed in this envelope, but I have sent you some dried bay leaves to place around your bedding and in your pockets if the flies become bad again. One of the Italian ladies that helps me with my language lessons - Miss Bianca - swears by dried bay leaves to dissuade flies from her pantry. Perhaps they might not help, but I doubt they could hurt.

I hesitate to bring this up because I know that you disapprove of my spending time worrying about you, but one of the soldiers of your battalion is still corresponding with Lily (and remind me to never complain about my own name. Poor Lily Violet Rose longs for the day she is wed if only to have a non-floral aspect in her name). Be that as it may, she came to me with her letter in hand gushing about how you left the trenches under enemy fire and drug an officer to safety that had been injured during a shelling*. She thought I was merely being modest on your behalf by not bringing it up and I managed to keep a straight face. Which, might I add, is probably the best acting that I have ever accomplished as I seem to have fooled everyone into believing that was the case.

I suppose that where I am going with this is, while I appreciate you not wanting to worry me, I shall worry far more if I have to wonder what other incidents of this nature that you are keeping from me. I am certainly aware that there are many things you cannot speak of for security reasons, but please do not hesitate to tell me the rest. All that I can realistically do from this distance is to give you an outlet and I am more than willing to perform that function for you.

As to your other request, you are always in my nightly prayers, but I believe I will add a morning prayer to my daily routine and you will be in those as well.

All of my love always,

Millicent

(* - See note below)

From : Cairo, Egypt

December 2, 1915

Millicent

Much as I am glad that you are in Switzerland and that country seems to be being spared the worst of the war so far, you cannot know how much good it would do me to see your dear face again. I hesitated to write to you, but you did make me promise to both write and not to hide unpleasantness from you. As you have become as close to a sister to me, I cannot and will not break that vow to you. Please do not read further unless you are seated.
I received word this morning from my father that my brother Will is missing in action and has been since October 23. I know missing in action does not mean dead, but while I am still grieving for Frank, I cannot to cling to that thread of hope. If that were not distress even, I believe that Will's loss may well drive a wedge between my father and I. Father's tone in the letter made him seem quite put out that Will left everything to me.

To understand this, I need to tell you a bit more about Will. I am sure you recall the poems of his that I showed you as you remarked that you admired his way with words. A good bit of his poetry was inspired by Janet Laurie, a lady our mother did not approve of. I wonder if Will was simply exercising caution or if he had a premonition, but regardless of the reason, he left me instructions that, in case of his death, he wanted me to give any money he might have left behind to his beloved Janet. I cannot, of course, explain to my father that Will did not actually leave any money to me without causing an awful row, so I shall have to pretend not to know Will's reasons for making me his sole beneficiary and try to make arrangements to fulfill Will's wishes without he and my mother finding out.

Of course, my dearest hope is that Will is still alive and will return home to marry his lady love. But, facing reality? Planes are fragile things and when a plane goes down in wartime, survival is unlikely. I took a glance at the date and it struck me hard that eight days from now is - would have been - Will's 26th birthday. At year's start, I had three younger brothers - now I only have one. I feel old beyond my years, Millicent. Of all people, I know you understand what I mean. I must also beg of you the favor of relaying the news of my brother to Alexander. I honestly do not have it in me to write it out a second time.

Sorry to burden you with all of this, but on now to lighter topics. First, let me assure you that I am following the same regimen that you put me on while you were here. I am eating three meals a day whether I feel like it or not and resting for eight hours whether I actually sleep or not. You needn't fret as I have every intention of meeting you and Alexander once the world comes to its' senses again.

Inside this parcel are three small packages, two wrapped in brown paper and one tied with string. One wrapped package is intended for your Christmas present and the other for your birthday. I shall leave it to you which package goes with each day. The one with the string is to be opened now. I saw the brooch and immediately thought of sending it to you. I was told the leaves of the cluster are formed from emerald and the grapes from lapis lazuli. I hope you like it. I am certainly no jewelry expert, but I know what I find attractive.

Remember me to Alexander. I hope to learn both of you are in good health when next I hear from you.

T.E.L.

From : 28th County of London Battalion
December 9, 1915

My darling Millicent,

Mail caught up to our movements yesterday and I was pleased to find both your letters from October 31st and November 15th in my mail packet. The weather has made a decided turn for the worse which made the arrival of the gloves and socks you thoughtfully sent very timely. I passed my older gloves on to a poor chap that had none at all and he asked me to send along his thanks to you. One
present and two soldiers the more comfortable for it. I will hang onto those bay leaves and put them to the test. If all they manage is to ward off a few of the flies, I will be happy.

I have written of you to my Aunt Avelina, so you should expect a parcel from her, hopefully before Christmas but there is no way to tell with how the mails are these days. Even if not in time for Christmas, I hope it will reach you in time for your sixteenth birthday. I trust you will not mind that I have asked her to send your Christmas and birthday presents to you.

Regarding the incident in the trenches, it was not my intent to keep you in the dark, my dear. It simply didn't seem worth mentioning as I was fine and you have no acquaintance with Lieutenant Baldwin. Things happen often that could have been bad, but weren't. I am here and try not to dwell on them, so please don't dwell on them yourself. Even without a war, a man in his prime can be struck down by any number of things. Trust that I will exercise all due diligence and have every intention of returning to you. I did, after all, promise to attend your graduation and I consider myself to be a man of my word.

I shall write to you over Christmas if opportunity presents itself, but since I know that letter will not be seen by you until after New Years, I shall go ahead and wish you a Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year and a Happy Birthday as well.

Looking forward to your next letter - Ever yours,

Alexander

From: Thun, Switzerland

December 21, 1915

My dearest Alexander,

I hadn't planned to write until Christmas Eve, but yesterday's mail changed that. I haven't gotten any new mail from you but there was a letter from Lawrence. As I read it, I remembered something you wrote to me when you told me about attending the ceremony for the Royal Flying Corp - about the two-edged sword of air travel. Lawrence's younger brother Will was in a plane that was shot down.

Lawrence has just received word when he wrote to me last month, but Will has been considered as missing in action since October. I feel terrible for Lawrence - one brother dead and another missed in the same year. He asked me to give the news about his brother to you as he didn't believe he could stand to write the words again. While there is a chance Will may still be found, Lawrence doesn't truly hold out much hope that Will might still be alive. Will also has a sweetheart that he made arrangements to provide for through Lawrence should anything happen to him. Their parents are not to know because they bear ill will toward the young lady and Lawrence fears that keeping the secret will drive a wedge in their family relationships. Though honestly, possibly not as large a wedge as telling them the truth would.

Families are such odd things. They have the power to make one very content or wholly miserable. Ermengarde's father comes immediately to mind. She is generally so lively around Christmas, but this year, she is so withdrawn, it pains me to look at her. I do believe she has lost some weight as well. While not meaning to be uncharitable when I say that losing a few pounds will not do her harm, the manner in which she is losing it is what worries me. As she tried to keep watch over me while I was ill, I am trying to keep an eye on her.

I hesitate to label the enclosed scarf as a gift as I am afraid that, while warm, it demonstrates that my
knitting skills sorely need improving. Perhaps by the time winter comes around again, I will manage a scarf with both form and function. I do hope that by then the war will have ended by then. This will already be your second Christmas away. I admit I made the mistake of asking our history instructor about how long wars can last and ended up learning far more than I desired about the Hundred Years War. Needless to say, her answer was not a comforting one.

With the way the mails have been of late, you aren't like to see it until after my birthday, so in addition to wishing you a peaceful, if not a merry, Christmas and an equally peaceful New Years. Our star seems very far away tonight, but you are in my thoughts and prayers as always.

All my love always,

Millicent

From : 28th County of London Battalion

December 25, 1915

My darling Millicent,

I am keeping my promise to write to you over Christmas, but this will be a short one possibly better suited to a postcard. The weather is showing every sign of turning foul, so everyone is hard at work trying to prepare for it. A trench is a miserable place in bad weather.

I hope you and your fellow students were able to enjoy a least a little of what should be the gaiety of the season. It is too sorrowful a thought that this war might blight out the holiday season for everyone.

For myself, I am grateful to have dry socks and a sturdy pair of good gloves, both of which I have you to thank for. Our star is somewhere behind all of the clouds, but there is a comfort in knowing that some things are where they should be whether we can see them or not.

I doubt I shall be able to write again until sometime in January. By the time this letter reaches you, you shall be sixteen with only a bit over two years more schooling to go. I still fully intend to attend your graduation ceremony. By that time, hopefully this war will be behind us.

Your thoughts and prayers are much appreciated, my dear girl. You are in mine as well.

Ever yours,

Alexander

Chapter End Notes

*For those that care *g*:

1916 - January thru June

From: Thun, Switzerland

January 1, 1916

Dear Lawrence,

We were allowed to stay up to see in the New Year and now, as I find I cannot sleep yet, I find my thoughts turning to you. I wrote to Alexander about your dear brother, but have yet to hear back from him. As you have likely had experience with yourself, the mails seem to be quite sporadic, so I am not even sure that my letter has even reached him yet.

I beg your indulgence to ask your opinion on a matter. There really isn't anyone else I can talk to about it without possibly cause more of a stir than the situation calls for. Allow me to explain.

Due to his current circumstances, Alexander wrote to his aunt and requested her to shop for him in order to send a Christmas and birthday present to me. While I most certainly do not mean to imply that I am not pleased that he would bother to think of such things, I rather wish that he had not.

The parcel arrived just two days ago and, since I knew from Alexander's letter what it was supposed to contain, I left it until after midnight today to open. The contents are a large portion of the reason that I cannot sleep. The parcel was literally stuffed with religious tracts as well as a Bible. From the note she also enclosed, it is quite apparent that his aunt is of the opinion that my morals are not as should befit a woman and also imply that I am after Alexander's money.

I have not the slightest idea of how to deal with this, Lawrence. Alexander is bound to eventually ask if I received the parcel. I certainly don't want to set a precedence of lying to him, but neither do I want to make a rift between he and his aunt. It also bothers me greatly that his relative holds such a low opinion of me.

Again, I apologize for tossing all of this at you, but you are the only one I can think of that might be able to give me some sensible advice on the matter.

I must thank you for the lovely presents that you sent me. I cannot tell you how much being able to open the present from you buoyed my spirits after that parcel. The one that I opened today was that cunning little amethyst brooch with the watch set in the stone. It amazes me how small the watch is and to think of the craftsmanship that went into making it.

The one I opened on Christmas Day was absolutely adorable. The little cat was carved out of lapis lazuli like the grape cluster, wasn't it? I do so like the rich color and the carving itself is charming. The attitude is so like a kitten that I halfway expect it to bound off to chase a butterfly.

The small packet I am sending with this letter is certainly not of the same caliber as what you have sent to me, but I recalled the name of those sweets you said that you missed so much and my guardian was kind enough to send a tin of them to me to send on to you. I wish they had gotten here earlier so that you might have had them at Christmas-time, but I hope that they will still be a pleasant surprise all the same.

I am keeping you and yours in my thoughts and prayers. Please continue to take good care of yourself. As you instructed, I try not to fret, but I cannot help the occasional worry seeping in.

With fondest regards,
Lawrence,

I received Millicent's letter just this morning telling me the news of your brother. I sincerely hope that by the time this letter reaches you that you have heard some positive news. It is a dreadful burden to be so far away and unable to do anything constructive where family is involved. I do still have some connections in Whitehall, so if you think any of them might be useful in ferreting out anything for you, please do not hesitate to ask. I cannot promise results, but I believe I can at least ensure the attempt to provide them.

Outside of personal matters, I hope that things are not too grim where you are currently. Millicent would scold me for it, but there are things I cannot bear to write to her. It isn't that she wouldn't understand, but rather that she would understand all too well. The rains were so bad that some poor chaps actually were drowned in their trenches when they flooded and when I smoke the pipe she gave me, it is far less to enjoy the tobacco and far more to dim the smells of unwashed bodies and decomposing flesh.

It seems as if I have been here forever. A man I pulled back into the trenches after a shell hit has been sent to a military hospital back in England. Poor chap's right leg was shattered and he'll likely be crippled in it for life. He's not the only one that will carry the scars of this war long after it is over.

Does it sound peculiar to say that while I detest the misery I see my fellow soldiers in, I am proud to be part of a group that is bearing that misery so stoically? Perhaps a group of men being able to do such a thing in adverse conditions is where the saying 'misery loves company' comes from. I am quite sure that if we were not all surrounded by others equally as miserable that the complaining would be long and loud.

I am nearly to the end of this sheet and I have only one other that is dry, so I will end this letter and save the other sheet to jot a note to Millicent. Knowing her, she is already praying for your brother and I will add my own prayers to those.

In hopes of better times to come,

Alexander

My darling Millicent,

I received your letter regarding Lawrence's brother this morning. I wrote a note to him before starting this one to you. After already losing one brother, I know he must be devastated now that Will is missing in action. I hope by the time this reaches you that he will have had some news, good or bad. For my own self, not knowing would be the absolute worst thing.

You didn't need to make apologies for your needlework. It doesn't look as bad as you make out and it is not only warm, but the wool sheds water very well. Believe me when I say that is quite a plus
here. It was also very thoughtful of you to choose drab colored yarn. The last thing a man wants to do is present a brightly colored target for the enemy.

I hope the package to you from England arrived in time for your birthday, but between the war and the weather, you might end up receiving it this spring instead.

Mentioning the package reminds me. Gordon Samuels, the young chap here that your Ermengarde has been corresponding with, has been showing off the hat and mittens that she made for him as if they had been knitted from gold. I am certain he has already sent his thanks to her, but I thought it might raise her spirits some to know how greatly he does appreciate them. He even sleeps in the mittens at night - says they are the only things that keep his fingers defrosted enough that they don't pain him and keep him awake. His fingers were very nearly frostbitten last winter and his hands still seem over-sensitive to cold nearly a year later.

I hate to cut this short, but this is my last piece of dry paper at present. I know your February exams are approaching, so your letter writing will be severely curtailed, but do try and drop a few lines when you are able. I am certain you will pass your test with your usual flying colors.

The light is fading now and so I will end this with wishes for your continued good health and I join you in your hopes that this war will soon be a part of history.

Ever yours,

Alexander

From : Cairo, Egypt

January 15, 1916

Millicent,

Just got your letter and I'm going to do my best to get this written quickly. One of the men here is headed for London and will be dropping this letter off for me on his way and he's doing the same for several of the other men here. All of which means, you should hopefully get this letter rather quickly for once.

Regarding writing to Mrs. Chapman, this is going to take a bit of finesse. Fortunately, if memory serves me correctly, you have the perfect excuse for your letter to Alexander's aunt to be a bit tardy. Holidays followed by exams are bound to take away from the correspondence time of many young ladies. I hope my suggestions are agreeable to you.

Step one, for the letter to his aunt, you must to get the right tone, but make sure your letter makes it sound as if you were thrilled with the parcel. This will be the hardest part for you, but perhaps if you look at it as writing a letter while playing a part in a play, it might help you achieve the proper frame of mind. Step two, you must pretend to be completely unaware that anything in the parcel was directed towards you except for the Bible. Also do not mention her hints about you having a mercenary nature - which you should not need reassuring on, but I can certainly vouch that you are nothing of the sort.

Step three, I have my doubts due to the limitations in time and resources that Alexander is currently facing that he has told his aunt many details about you. I suggest that you make mention of your guardian and her position in Her Majesty's household. Step four would be to emphasize without being too obvious that the relationship between yourself and Alexander is above reproach. Looking back over this, I do know this is a tall order, but from the letters I have of yours, I have every faith
that you will be able to pull it off.

The sweets you sent arrived in top-notch condition and were a delightful surprise. As to what I have sent you, I know it is rather boorish to talk about the cost of things, but I trust you will forgive me as I only do so to ease your mind. What the cause is for the difference, I have no idea, but jewelry pieces here cost only a fraction of what I would expect them to cost back in England. Then add onto that the current strength of the British pound here, which stretches the value of one pound to being equal to five or six pounds? Suffice to say, I did not spend unseemly amounts on the trinkets that I sent to you nor was it my intent to imply that I had. It was simply the case of seeing something that caught my eye and obeying a whim to send it along. I have no little sister of my own to spoil and hope you do not mind filling that niche for me.

If I might make one last remark and one that I am not at all sure how you will receive, do not allow Avelina Chapman (nor indeed, anyone else) to put you on the defensive about the circumstances of your birth - a matter that was most emphatically not of your doing. I myself am from what can be euphemistically termed the shady side of my family tree. It is not where and how we begin life that counts, but what we do with that life once we are of age to grasp hold of our own destinies. And you, dear Millicent, have both the wit and will to forge your course wisely.

I must finish here. I have a railway study that I am doing that I must get back to and, of course, I must get this letter to Coulson before he departs.

T.E.L.

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From: Thun, Switzerland

January 31, 1916

Dear Mrs. Chapman,

Please accept my apologies for not responding more promptly to the delightful parcel that you kindly sent to me. It arrived just before our examinations began at the school and our Headmistress is quite strict when it comes to us devoting all of our waking hours to our studies during that period.

The Bible was lovely. I have the one that my guardian gave me on my thirteenth birthday, but it has become worn over the years, so I believe I will use the newer one to take for our Sunday studies at the chapel. I wrote to Lady Anne just before starting this letter and mentioned your kindness to her.

I cannot express how grateful that I was when the Ministry assigned your nephew Alexander to be my escort while I traveled to my boarding school. My dear mother's passing was so sudden that she had not had the opportunity to make the proper arrangements for my journey herself. The letters that I have been able to exchange with him have helped me a great deal as well. The school I am attending is very nice, but it is not home as London is and his letters help me to stave off the occasional bout of homesickness.

Before I neglect to mention it, I must thank you as well for the variety of religious tracts you enclosed along with the gift. I had no idea that Alexander would have mentioned the missionary work that our school sponsors to you, but the Sister in charge of donations was thrilled to receive the tract as she had been quite unable to get any through her regular contacts due to their own war work.

Yours sincerely,

Millicent Kildare
From : Thun, Switzerland

February 1, 1916

Dear Lawrence,

I received your letter and had it close by as I wrote to Alexander's aunt yesterday. I don't know that it will improve her opinion of me, but I know I felt a great deal better for having written it, so I thank you for your advice.

Regarding the lovely items you've sent, I didn't mean to imply that I was in any way concerned about the propriety of your gifts. I don't think you are boorish in the least, but I suppose I should admit that I do not have what would be considered a proper young ladies attitude toward such things. My dear Mother was what one might term unconventional and I suppose I should take care to find out which of her views would be considered shocking. I do seem to mortify my dear Ermengarde on a regular basis without even trying.

I rather enjoy the thought of having an elder brother, so I found it delightful that you tend to think of me as a little sister. I have heard it said that one cannot choose one's relatives, but I see no reason why that should be the case as long as both parties involved agree.

Very pleased that the sweets made it to you in good condition. The way things are going here, I fear I will not be able to send anything else like them. We've been warned that problems at the borders are affecting parcels - thankfully not letters yet. Parcels are said to be being broken into and the contents stolen so it would be best if you do not send anything other than letters this direction either.

I suppose a great deal of the theft comes from where Switzerland has no ports of it's own and not a great deal of farmland. The major of raw goods used to make clothing or cook with are normally imported. We are fortunately here at the school that our headmistress apparently foresaw this sort of problem and made sure we had chickens, goats and a kitchen garden on the school grounds. I and several other girls who have been judged to have decent aim will also be participating in the local hunts - no longer social events so much as to add food to our larders. It will be the only way that we will see meat for awhile excepting when there are too many roosters or a chicken stops producing eggs.

When I write next, I will let you know how the hunts are going. You are often in my thoughts and I continue to pray for your continued well being. Much as I value your opinions, I do wish that you had not been quite so accurate as to the length of the war.

With fondest regards,

Millicent

From : 28th County of London Battalion

February 23, 1916

My darling Millicent,

I received the strangest letter yesterday from my Aunt Avelina. From the tone of it, I have the distinct impression that she conducted herself in a manner that I would not approve of regarding the present that I requested be sent. There is a bookseller that I frequent near my home and I had asked for her to purchase two books that I knew had been available there, both written in Italian - Divina Commedia by Dante and Ninfale Fiesolano by Boccaccio. If you are not comfortable telling me what it was that
she did have sent to you, I will not press the issue, but do let me know whether or not those books were at least a part of it. If not, I have other means of getting them sent to you.

The weather has been absolutely dreadful, but I don't suppose February is ever pleasant unless one can spend it inside a snug house with a good fire. I hope that happy situation is the one that you are in at your school and that you have avoided illnesses again. Do you and Ermengarde still take daily doses of that vinegar concoction? I would be very interested to learn what ingredients it contains. One should never sneer at the wisdom passed down from a grandmother.

It is nearly time for my watch, so I will close here with my assurances that while I am not experiencing the comforts of home, neither am I suffering from either wounds or illness. We must both simply keep our eyes to the horizon a bit longer, my girl. I daresay we are both stubborn enough to outlast this war.

Always yours,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

April 11, 1916

My dearest Alexander,

First off, I must apologize profusely for the lengthy delay between my letters. When your last two letters arrived together yesterday, I was shocked to realize how time had gotten away from me. Shortly after our examinations, we had illness break out in the school again. The doctor seems to be of the opinion that it is due in part to the limitations that the war has been putting on our diets.

I was fortunate enough not to be stricken, but poor Ermengarde was not so fortunate. She is still not strong and I have been trying to keep her spirits up by reading to her and tempting her to eat. It is shocking how much weight she has lost and how fragile she looks. I am quite worried to be honest. What time has not been spent on schoolwork or tending to Ermengarde has been spent hunting. I am part of a group of five from the school and the meat that we have been able to shoot is now the only meat that we have. The doctor might well have a point about our diets. Soups and stews are our mainstays now as the cooks are stretching the meat as much as possible. Bread is also starting to appear less often. I daresay that is becoming common. Surely large farms cannot be worked with so many men at war and we have heard tales from Viveka's family that small kitchen gardens are being raided with not even scraps left behind for the poor families that raised them.

I have read over the first part of this letter and I am sorry it is so dismal. I will strive to be more positive when I write on your birthday. I fear a letter will be as much as I can send this year, but I trust you will understand. I wish so much that this war would end, but I also know that I cannot possibly wish for that more than you do.

In regards to your letter of January 6th, I am so pleased that the scarf is proving of use to you in the horrid weather you have to be out in so often. I read out loud to Ermengarde the mention of how much Mister Sanders appreciates the knitted goods she made. She was so pleased and it raised her spirits wonderfully.

Regarding both that and your letter of February 23rd, I did receive the package your Aunt Avelina was so kind to send. There was a good deal of reading material inside, but she must not have been able to include either of the two books you mentioned. If you still wish to have them sent, I know I
would enjoy them, but please do not go to any trouble.

Viveka has come into our rooms with a handful of drawings she has done and, when she heard I was writing to you, insisted that I send along one of her drawings with your letter. I think she shows a great deal of talent, not only for her age, but for any age. Whenever she draws a bird or a flower, I can always make out the variety.

At least her lovely flower should brighten this letter. Please be safe, Alexander. As always, you are in my heart and prayers.

All my love,

Millicent

From : Thun, Switzerland

April 21, 1916

My dearest Alexander,

Happy twenty-fifth birthday, though it will be long past by the time you receive this, of course. It seems I have something to send to you after all. Viveka drew a lovely bouquet with a flower for every year for you. I will not be a bit surprised if she gains renown as an artist one day.

In the past ten days, Ermengarde's appetite has increased and she is much stronger now. The doctor no longer looks at her and heads off to whisper with the teachers, so that must be a sign that her health is returning. The weather is growing nicer and perhaps the sunshine and fresh air will complete her cure.

For myself, being one of the school's hunting party means that I am getting ample fresh air and, not to sound like a braggart, I have become quite proficient at the hunt. I no longer fear the accidental shooting of my host should the opportunity ever arise that I am invited for a hunt in the country. My schoolmates may not be dining on steak and mutton, but they do have meat every day. Something I am told has become a luxury in other areas.

I cannot for the life of me recall if I remembered to tell you about something Lawrence said in one of his letters to me. He said that he feels as if I fill a spot for him as a little sister. That warmed my heart so much. As an only child, I have often wondered what it would be like to have siblings and now I have two. Not dear Ermengarde, in case she is the one that came to you mind as my second. Little Viveka touches my heart as I have always imagined a younger sister would. I suppose that between my feelings for Lawrence and Viveka that I have placed myself in the position of the middle child.

I believe I neglected in my last letter to mention the results of my examinations. I passed all of my academics with top marks. In addition, I managed to complete both my sewing and cooking tests without doing permanent damage to either myself or the school. Surely all cooking cannot be so complicated as our instructress makes it appear or cooks would be worth far more than gold or jewels.

As your birthday has fallen on a Friday and I was not able to begin this letter earlier, I must finish it off now to make sure it is taken out in today's post. The post is only taken out twice a week now and I fear this will go through quite enough delay without my adding to it.

I shall be looking for our star tonight. You are, as always, foremost in my thoughts and prayers.
All my love,

Millicent

From : 28th County of London Battalion

May 6, 1916

My darling Millicent,

I received your letter of April 11th earlier this week, but this is the first moment of calm that I have had to write. First, please relay my thanks to Miss Viveka. Her charming drawing brightened my spirits as well as those of the men around me. We are all in agreement that she is a talented young lady.

Secondly, do not fret so about your responsibilities getting in the way of your letter writing. You have continued to write faithfully and I look forward to each letter. Speaking of mail, I am presuming that you must have mentioned my birthday to your guardian as I received a parcel from her on the same day that your letter arrived. The tobacco and fresh socks were a welcome surprise. When I was admiring the socks, it was rather odd to think that, back in my boyhood days, I would not have greeted socks with enthusiasm.

I have a fear that you are being overly polite in regards to my Aunt Avelina, but I hope the books I had intended for you will arrive soon. To get to the news that I would rather avoid, I am afraid we are going to be in the thick of things for awhile, so please do not worry if my letters cease for a time. Arnold has informed me that I must sign off now if this letter is to go out. He's been kind enough to keep me abreast of the time since my poor pocket watch fell victim to the perpetual dampness we live in.

While I have come to understand that there is no place of true safety, I still take some comfort knowing that you are in a relative pocket of peace. Keep well, my dearest girl. I will write again as soon as I am able.

With fondest esteem, yours always,

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

May 11, 1916

My dearest Alexander,

I will begin by warning you that this is another dismal letter, so if it needs be put to the side for now, I would quite understand.

Poor Ermengarde is in quite a state. She received word from her father yesterday - in a rather blunt way - that his new wife did not survive childbirth nor did the infant live beyond its first few hours. Her father also quite coldly informed her that she need not expect to come home in the foreseeable future and that he had already written to make arrangements for her to spend all future holidays here at the school. He also mentioned that he would not be visiting.

Not that he has ever been a regular presence in her life, but it would have been far kinder to simply
go on as he normally does rather than put in all in writing.

Even though I barely knew her, I cannot help but feel sad for that late Lady Winifred Breckenridge. Not that all death is not tragic, but passing before attaining the age of twenty seems quite cruel. I believe that is what strikes me as particularly horrid about the war. So many young men who will never reach true adulthood or start families of their own.

Ermengarde had been assisting me in planning a small party to celebrate Viveka's ninth birthday, so I am hoping she will pull back out of her shell with that to distract her.

I have not received any letters of late, but neither have any of the other girls, so if I have not addressed a question you have sent to me, that is why. It is nearly time to go out hunting again, so I will sign off for now. You remain, as always, in my thoughts and prayers.

All my love,

Millicent

From : Thun, Switzerland

May 12, 1916

My dearest Alexander,

Let me begin by profusely apologizing to you. When I realized what I had done, I tried to retrieve the letter I wrote yesterday, but it had already been taken away. While I was writing about Lady Breckenridge, it had completely slipped my mind that you told me that your own dear mother also passed in childbirth. I feel absolutely horrid for having written you about it and beg your forgiveness for my thoughtlessness. I will turn now to other topics and try to keep from blathering on about it.

I hope the weather is better now wherever you are. It has been mild and pleasant here. I know that both Lawrence and yourself have said in the past that you feel better knowing that I am here, but I find myself feeling guilty. We do miss some of what were once common items on the table, but our situation is so much better than it is for those on the other side of these borders. My mother kept her eye on what she called the winds of politics. It makes me wonder if she had expectations of this war when she decided I should attend a Swiss school.

Now that the plants are green and thriving again, the animals we are bringing in from our hunts are not so pitifully thin. Our hunt master is quite old, but full of advice and bits of wisdom that he passes along freely. He has also drilled into us to never hunt the females of any species until late summer, when they have had time to nurture their young to the point of fending for themselves.

Is it horrid of me to be counting the days until Lavinia is gone? Which reminds me, I do not believe I have written to you about her engagement. Her father has arranged a marriage for her with a minor noble from the German Empire. She brags about it without pause, but I cannot help but wonder how well that union will fare when, until her engagement, Lavinia constantly degraded the Germanic tongue as uncouth. I cannot recall her intended's name, but he is a Freiherr, which I am told equates to a Baron.

The wedding will be next month and will, of course, be nowhere near here. Lavinia will be departing at month's end to make the journey to the family home of her future husband. Why there seems to be such as rush toward the nuptials puzzles me. So far as I am aware, Lavinia has not even laid eyes on the nobleman in question or even seen a picture of him. I suppose that is her worry and not my own. Since she seems more interested in his family's wealth and prestige, perhaps appearances and
compatibility do not enter into her considerations for a husband.

I will end with my continued prayers for your wellbeing and the hope that you and your fellows may all come home safely.

All my love,

Millicent

From : 28th County of London Battalion
June 4, 1916

Lawrence,

I have just finished looking through the packet you sent to me. I owe you quite the debt, old fellow. The ring is perfect and the stone in it is precisely the color I had in mind. If Millicent does me the honour of accepting it when the time comes, I hope that circumstances will allow you to stand as my best man.

From the vague references in your letter, I know something huge must be in the works. I wish you well in whatever your endeavors are. For myself, I am deathly tired of these seemingly endless trenches.

When this conflict finally ends, it will seem like a piece of Heaven to sit in an actual chair with a cup of piping hot tea while wearing perfectly dry clothing. I cannot easily remember the last time I was both warm and dry.

I've taken a moment to find a safe place among my things that I carry with me to store the ring. I wouldn't trust it anywhere but with me. Again, you have my gratitude.

Alexander

From : 56th 1st London Division
June 6, 1916

My darling Millicent,

While mail to my former battalion will still get forwarded on, myself and several of my comrades are being transferred to fill in ranks for the 56th 1st London Division, so in the future, you will want to direct your letters there.

I have only a few more minutes before we are mustering out, so I will take them to express my gratitude at the quirk of fate that threw us together. Your letters have meant a great deal to me over the years and I cannot conceive of how life in these trenches would have been without them to look forward to.

Stay well and keep to your studies. Do not forget I still intend to attend your graduation.

With fondest esteem, yours always,

Alexander
1916 - July thru December

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

From: Cairo, Egypt

July 2, 1916

Alexander,

Dashing off a quick note to let you know how pleased I am that the ring reached you safely. I do hope you realize that you had best take very good care of my surrogate baby sister.

Speaking of which, while I would be more than honored to stand as your best man, I think our Millicent has first dibs on me if she decides she wants me to walk her down the aisle. Of course, she may choose to enlist that French gentlemen the two of you call Uncle Lucien for that role, which would free me for best man.

Watch out for yourself - I've a feeling things are about to heat up all over and I've already done more than enough mourning.

T.E.L.

From: Thun, Switzerland

July 3, 1916

Dear Uncle Lucien,

It was so good to receive your letter and hear that you and your family are well. I was delighted to hear of Cerise's engagement. If he has gained your approval, Henri Bissette must be a fine man.

I must thank you for your generous offer to visit your home. You spoke of it so charmingly while we were traveling together that I feel that I have already been there, but I am sad to say that my guardian feels that it isn't safe for me to make the trip to France at this time. I do so hope that I will be able to make that trip in the near future.

Our dear Alexandre' was well when last I received a letter from him. I know that he writes to you on occasion as well, but the delay of the mails seems to be growing steady worse. Of course, with the war, I suppose we are fortunate that any mail at all is reaching its destination.

Do extend my best wishes to Cerise. If I recall correctly, she will be turning nineteen near the end of this month. Regarding her question, I would be delighted to exchange letters with her to help her improve her English.

I have read in the news that there is fighting in Verdun and I am glad your home is far from there. I pray that your and your family remain safe during these terrible times.

In hopes of brighter days. Love from your devoted niece,

Millicente
From : Vaucluse, France

July 30, 1916

Ma très chère Millicente,

I have wished to meet you in person since my dear Papa first told me about meeting you and Alexandre when he was returning home from his annual trip - that was the last trip he was able to make due to the war. Alas, we understand all too well that now is not a time to travel for pleasure.

I am thankful daily that we live in the south of ma bien-aimé France. I do not hear many details of what is happening in the northern lands near Lille, but even such as I have heard is dreadful to contemplate. Your guardian is quite wise to be concerned.

Please do not think that the invitation is only for now. We will welcome you with open arms when le bon Dieu grants we have peace once more.

My dearest Mama died while I was still quite young and, though my Mama had a brother and two sisters and Papa has three brothers, all they have given me is male cousins. I am delighted to consider you part of our family, but I must caution that we are still dreadfully outnumbered by the men. C'est la vie.

Papa tells me he wrote to you about my engagement. Henri proposed when he came home briefly from the war to recover from injuries. It was a blessing that he has healed from them, but his renewed health means that he has returned to the war. We will not set a date until his service has ended.

I am sending you a photograph of myself so that you may see what I look like. It is not recent, but I have not changed much since it was taken. If you have one of yourself, I would very much like to have one, but quite understand if that is not possible.

Je t'embrasse de votre cousin,

Cerise

From : Thun, Switzerland

August 16, 1916

Ma très chère Cerise,

Your letter arrived this morning and I was delighted to see that you had included a picture. I had an image of you in my mind from Uncle Lucien's description, but it was lovely to see how closely I had been able to imagine you.

I had no idea that your Henri had already been wounded. I shall add him to my prayers in hope that he comes through the rest of the war without suffering further injury. It sounds as if he is a neighbor of yours. I am being dreadfully nosey, but have you known one another long?

I have heard very little of what is happening in France beyond the fact that there is fighting going on there. Our Headmistress started severely curtailing any actual news coming into the school, but my guardian has been kind enough to send me some of the papers and the Headmistress is not so brash that she opens my mail from her. I was however told quite strictly to keep them to myself and not discuss them with the other young ladies.
We are a frightfully sheltered lot here at this school and it worries me to an extent. On one hand, I can see where the adults over us do not wish to expose us too much to the worst of the world. Yet, on the other hand, should the war eventually come to where we are, I fear it would be devastating to be so ill-prepared. I think that, at the very least, those of us over the age of fourteen should be told some of what is going on. The day will come when we leave the school and our homelands are all bound to be undergoing massive changes.

Even in our isolated little pocket, I can see some signs of what the war is causing. The French ladies that work here are now barely civil to the German ones. From some of the comments I have picked up, it sounds as if the German army is actually occupying part of France. Even imagining such a thing happening to England gives me the shudders, so I can sympathize with the feelings that the French ladies must be having even though the German ladies have had as little to do with the war as they themselves have.

I do have a photograph of myself that I am sending to you. As with yours, it is not recent, but I believe there has not been a great deal of change except with the length of my hair. Not terribly long after the image was taken, I and several other girls in the school were dreadfully ill. Those of us who were in quarantine were shorn of our locks. Despite the passage of time since, I have not regained the length that I lost then.

It is probably scandalous to say so, but I rather enjoyed it when my hair was short. I would have enjoyed it more had it not made me look slightly boyish, still the freedom from having to spend so much time tending to my hair was quite nice.

I must sign off for now as it is nearly time for me to give one of my fellow classmates some help with her English conjugations. Be well and please write again when you are able.

Votre cousine dévouée,

Millicente

From : Thun, Switzerland

September 1, 1916

Dear Lawrence,

Another month has passed and yet the war seems to be getting larger instead of dwindling as I had hoped it would be this point. I am not certain if you have recently received mail from Alexander or not, so I thought I would pass along that he is now with the 56th 1st London Division. While he indicated that mail sent to his former battalion would be forwarded, the mails are taking quite long enough without adding another step to the whole process.

There is the beginning of a fall nip in the air here and I could not help but remember dreadfully hot it was while I was with you in Cairo last year and it had not even been summer then. Is it worse during this time of year?

I thought I should let you know that I am currently wearing that lovely grape brooch that you so kindly sent me. I do believe the lapis lazuli will always be one of my favorite stones. It has so much character.

While I know time and circumstances will limit when you can write, I hope to hear from you and hope all is well with you. I continue to pray for your safety and good health.
With fondest regards,

Millicent

From: Thun, Switzerland

September 12, 1916

My dearest Alexander,

It is a chill and wet day here. The rain began last night and has yet to let up. It isn't even what I would term an honest rain, but a weepy drizzle that seems to cling to the leaves of the plants and bend them down so that the whole of nature seems slumped over.

We are not going out hunting for a few days, but that has nothing to do with the weather. There is a group of prisoners of war who are doing some work in the area and the Headmistress does not want any of them to come in contact with anyone at our school. It seems odd to me for there to be prisoners of war in a neutral country. It almost feels like a contradiction somehow.

I have finished reading Boccaccio's *Ninfale Fiesolano*. It is beautiful, but so sad. Is it only me or are most romances rather tragic? After reading the classics, it is no wonder why some are disdainful of true love since it seems to end in the death of one or both parties in literature. I suppose that makes it more dramatic, but surely an occasional happy ending could also make a decent story.

Before I neglect to mention it, I've recently written to Lawrence and mentioned your recent transfer as I wasn't sure if you'd had a chance to inform him or not. I do hope the three of us can meet somewhere once the war is over. He has been such a dear friend and I rather enjoy having a source of brotherly advice available.

On to other news, I am exchanging letters now with Uncle Lucien's daughter, Cerise. She is engaged to be wed, which surprised me at first, then made me feel quite silly when I realized I was still thinking of her as the fourteen year old that Uncle Lucien described to us rather than as the nineteen year old young woman she is now. She sent me a photograph of herself and she has a rather striking face. She rather reminds me of the young ladies in some of Edgar Maxence's paintings. I have been invited to visit but, of course, not until travel is considerably safer than it is these days. Perhaps we will be able to visit together one day.

As always, I continue my prayers for your safety and good health. I have tucked in some mint leaves for you. I was told they are good for warding off several different sorts of biting insects as well as simply giving off a pleasant aroma.

All of my love always,

Millicent

From: 56th 1st London Division

October 16, 1916

My darling Millicent,

As we both thought might end up the case, earlier this week I received four letters from you when my mail caught up to my new division as well as one letter that you sent directly to the division. I
spread out reading them and will likely be reading through them again when time permits. The letters from Lawrence, Uncle Lucien and yourself are always welcome however late they arrive. Oddly enough, I rarely hear from my Aunt. She rarely writes to me unless it is direct response to a question I've sent.

I was most heartily sorrowed to hear of the tragic events in your poor Ermengarde's family. If you believe she would be receptive to it, please convey my condolences to her. On a related note, please do not feel as if you must edit out anything of distressing nature in your letters to me, my dear girl. Consider it the same as letting me know your health in that I would far rather hear the truth.

Before I neglect to mention it, I have enclosed a small thank you note for Miss Viveka. Her charming drawings have cheered up both my spirits and those of the men around me. They have been passed around and admired greatly. Jasper, one of the men that bunks down near me, remarked that her drawings reminded him of taking his own younger sister out to gather wildflowers when they were in bloom. Looking forward to doing that again is one thing that is keeping him going on the days that are particularly dismal.

I mentioned to Lawrence that it seems to be a coping mechanism for most of the lads I am fighting alongside that we rarely speak of the past and almost never about the present. Instead, we talk about what we will be doing in the future. Settling down, traveling or simply enjoying a pint and a quiet meal back in our home towns. I daresay all those around me know when you will be graduating by heart now just as I know how Harold plans to propose to his girlfriend when he returns from the war.

I suppose it is because thinking of the past is rather painful, but there is hope in looking beyond our daily struggles. We owe thanks to Pandora for preserving hope for all of mankind.

It is likely that I will not have opportunity to write again until near Christmas, but I will do my best to send a few lines if the opportunity presents itself. You are always in my heart and prayers.

With fondest esteem, yours always,

Alexander

From : Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank

November 12, 1916

To : Miss Millicent Kildare.

It is with regret that I must inform you as the next-of-kin that your fiancé, Captain Alexander Waverly, was seriously injured in combat and has been transferred to our care from the field hospital in France.

I feel that I must warn you that his prognosis is not good, however the fact that he survived the journey across the Channel does give some cause for optimism. From the address I found for you among Captain Waverly's possessions, I presume that you are an instructress at a boarding school and thus may not be free to travel, but I would urge you to attempt to visit Captain Waverly if at all possible. The lift that our patients here receive from a visit surpasses any treatment prescribed by the doctors.

Sincerely,

Violet Tate, V.A.D.
From : Thun, Switzerland

November 29, 1916

Dear Lawrence,

I trust you will excuse my shaky penmanship. While I do not yet know exactly what injuries he has sustained, I received a letter today from Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital informing me that Alexander is there and that his prognosis is not good.

Truthfully, I am not sure what that statement means. Does it mean that they believe he is dying or that he has a wound that he is unlikely to recover fully from? There it a great deal of difference between death and a limp. I must confess that my imagination is leaning toward the worst even though I am praying for the best.

I have already sent a telegram to my guardian in hopes that she will be able to facilitate a way for me to return to England for a time. My mind will not be at ease until I can see Alexander for myself.

Please keep both of us in your prayers. If I am able to reach him, I will write and let you know more on his condition.

With fondest regards,

Millicent

From : Paris, France

December 6, 1916

Ma très chère Cerise,

As you can see from this letter, I am close but still far away from you and Uncle Lucien. I am writing while waiting for the next section of my trip to England.

Alexandre has been wounded and is in the hospital. While I have not been told how badly, those I have spoken to since I began my journey say that it must be more than some minor injuries or they would not have sent him all the way back to England. I am grateful that my dear guardian has arranged for this trip and I do not think I will ever be able to thank her enough for her many kindnesses to me. She has even taken care of my accommodations by way of a boarding house within walking distance of the hospital.

I shall write again after I have been able to see Alexandre, but for now I must close as I have been informed we will be leaving shortly. I hope you, Uncle Lucien and your dear Henri all remain safe.

Votre cousine dévouée,

Millicente

From : London, England

December 12, 1916

My darling Ermengarde,
You can cease holding your breath. I am safely on the shores of England and, at this moment, sitting inside the study of my dear guardian. We have written regularly so it seems a bit odd when we actually met face to face for the first time. I am happy to say that she seems to approve the state of my education.

At Lady Anne's wise insistence, I will be spending today with her and the members of her household, getting some proper rest following my travels. Tomorrow, I will be traveling to the boarding house in Millbank where I shall be residing during the rest of my stay. I have learned more about the lady who will be my landlady. She is the mother of Lady Anne's personal maid, who I have now met and who is a most delightful woman. Her name is Adelaide Nolan and she speaks three languages fluently, which is necessary as Lady Anne insists on speaking French during mealtimes and Italian in her chambers. Adelaide's French accent is quite charming and reminds one more of the south of France than of Paris. While my Italian is comprehensible, I do not know the regions well enough to detect where her Italian accent originates. Regardless, I hope to pick up some of her ease with that tongue.

I am, of course, impatient to see Alexander for myself, but Lady Anne gently admonished me that I must not appear to be worn from my trip when he first sees me or he might worry needlessly about my health at a time when his own must be the priority. I do not know how I was so fortunate as to have had her agree to be my guardian. She has even arranged for Adelaide to accompany me to the cemetery this afternoon. Alexander mentioned to her that I had not been permitted to view my mother's grave and she was quite incensed about it.

I do not know how long it will be before I return to school nor do I know when I will be at liberty to write again. I have enclosed the address that I will be staying at if you care to send a letter while I am here. Do try not to get overexcited on your French lessons. You do an admirable job until you get flustered.

Be well and please remember me fondly.

Millicent

From : Millbank, Westchester Borough, Greater London

December 14, 1916

Dear Lawrence,

I cannot tell you when I have been angrier because I doubt that I ever have been. I do not know if you are aware of the situation in our homeland or not, but there is a dreadful shortage of doctors. The so-called doctor, whom I severely doubt actually has credentials, has judged that Alexander is unlikely to recover and has him on a drug regime that I suspect is purely meant to keep him quiet so that the doctor need not deal with him further. I have already been pulled aside by two of the ladies working here that have expressed that they do not approve of the doctor's methods, but have no authority to contradict him.

It seems that I may be in for a fight, but Alexander gave his assistance to me when I was in need of help and I do not plan to shirk my duty to him. Doctor Archibald Tyler and I will be having a talk tomorrow regarding Alexander's treatment, or rather the lack thereof.

The head matron, a formidable woman named Constance Anders whose daughter Patience is also a nurse here, is the one who gives me hope regarding the chances of Alexander's recovery. His voice is not at all recognizable due to some sort of gas he breathed in, but she assured me that she has seen
men recover from far worse exposure. She says the same in regards to the wounds in his lower body. Perhaps he may never run so fast as he once did but, in her personal experience, she cannot see why he should not be able to walk again. As she had been a nurse for over thirty years, her opinions carry a great deal of weight for me. Perhaps part of that is the way I see the other experienced nurses turning to her for an opinion. Surely the amount of respect other nurses have for her must mean she is very good at her craft.

I am living in a home that has been converted into a boarding house, probably for the duration of the war as the only people Mrs. Nolan allows to take lodging are those with family in the hospital. While I have never been privileged to know either of my grandmothers, Mrs. Nolan is everything I have ever imagined a grandmother might be like and has already been both a comfort and a source of strength for me. I am writing to you from the room that I have been assigned. I can even catch a glimpse of the Thames from the window the writing desk is near.

I pray that you remain healthy and whole wherever you are now. I know now that troops can be moved so quickly that one simply never knows where they might be from one day to the next. One of the nurses mentioned that Alexander had been wounded in Palestine, which was not a region I had even considered he might have been in. Apparently, his group had been reassigned under General Allenby, whose name I am not familiar with, but then, newspapers have been rare of late.

Should I refrain from mentioning names? I cannot imagine that it would be much of a secret if nurses and V.A.D.’s are discussing it quite openly. I won't rewrite this letter, but if you feel it best, I will not include that sort of thing in future correspondence.

Do take care, Lawrence. I shall keep you informed of Alexander's progress because I am quite certain that there will be progress to report.

With fondest regards,

Millicent

From : Millbank, Westchester Borough, Greater London

December 18, 1916

Dear Lawrence,

Well, I have most thoroughly stirred a hornet's nest. My talk with Doctor Tyler was most unsatisfactory to the point that I am afraid I did cause a bit of a scene by shoving him out of Alexander's room after saying he was better fit to tend cavalry horses. I doubt I made things better when, after he insisted I take back what I had said, I agreed that even cavalry horses deserved better treatment than they were likely to obtain at his hands.

I must confess that I did do one thing that I had once sworn I should never do - I called upon the position of my guardian. Bless her, she sent not only her personal maid Adelaide, but also a retired doctor, Doctor Arthur Conrad, whose experience and opinion she places a great deal of faith in.

Doctor Conrad shares the same views as the Head Matron. Recovery will be slow and unfortunately quite painful but, if Alexander is willing to work at it, he should have a good chance at recovery. To my relief, in spite of his age, Doctor Conrad has agreed to take over the treatment of Alexander and three other poor souls here that have been suffering from the same neglect.

I suppose I should mention in Doctor Tyler's defense that he was taken straight from school into service and has no actual experience with wounded to draw upon, but it isn't his lack of experience
that I blame him for. Rather, it is his refusal to admit his personal knowledge is lacking and his equally stubborn refusal to believe that the life experiences of the nursing staff are not worthy of being taken into account because they are women. The Head Matron must have the patience of a saint.

Speaking of the hospital, I must close now and ready myself to return there. I am being shown how to do several smaller things needed for Alexander's care that will free up the nurses and V.A.D.s to spend time looking after their other patients. I do not think I am understating it to say that they are filled to the rafters. I shall likely know far more than I ever cared to learn about hospitals over the course of the next few months.

You are in my prayers and I ask that you remember Alexander and myself in yours as well.

With fondest regards,

Millicent

From: Millbank, Westchester Borough, Greater London
December 26, 1916

My darling Ermengarde,

I hope this enamel brooch I sent for your Christmas present meets with your approval. The colorful little bird on the flowering branch looked so charming and I thought it would look lovely against the color of your favorite shawl. Do remember to wrap up well. The January winds are coming and you do have a tendency toward chills at the first of the year.

If you are not already seated, I advise you to do so. You are the very first one I have written to about this.

As you will doubtless recall, I purchased a sturdy Swiss pocket watch for Alexander's Christmas gift. He was quite pleased with it and had a gift awaiting me as well. It is a lovely delicate gold ring with three small diamonds separated by pale blue sapphires. Not one word about the impropriety, Ermengarde - I am an engaged woman now. Lady Anne has given us her blessing and she fully approves of our plans for a yearlong engagement. Alexander's health willing, we shall be wed sometime after my eighteenth birthday.

Alexander's health is still delicate, but I believe his coloration is far better than it was when I first arrived. His hands are still weak and shaky, but Doctor Conrad has started a course of therapy that he has high expectations for.

Despite my worries for Alexander's health, I do not believe that I have ever been happier. I am quite certain I have never had a better Christmas. I do hope you will share my happiness when the day arrives and agree to be my maid of honour. I cannot think of anyone I would want with me more.

Your devoted friend,

Millicent

From: Yenbo, Hejaz
December 30, 1916
Millicent,

Terribly sorry I haven't dropped a note sooner. This one can't be long either. Got a chance to look at the mail today and found out about Alexander's injuries and the fact that you are now there.

I know his injuries sound bad, but you have no idea how relieved I am that you didn't mention an amputation. Those are frightfully common as I am sure you will notice during your time at the hospital. They are so afraid of infections that limbs are sacrificed as a preventative measure. If only there were some way for infections to be fought without sacrificing the flesh. Enough on that subject.

Writing the date reminded me that it is only two days before you turn seventeen. It isn't a proper present, but I have enclosed a picture of my favorite camel, a splendid beast named Jedha, in hopes that it will amuse you.

I needn't tell you to watch over Alexander because I know you will. I will advise however that you guard your own health during the cold, damp British winter.

T.E.L.

Chapter End Notes

Author's note: for anyone caring about the story of the engagement, it is covered more fully in another of my stories 'Twas the Night Before Christmas' - Chapter 1 - Christmas Past. (http://archiveofourown.org/works/2190573/chapters/4797015)
Ma très chère Cerise,

Bonne année! I hope the year started auspiciously for you and Uncle Lucien. I am spending a very quiet seventeenth birthday at the bedside of my fiancé’ - I do not believe I shall of get tired of called Alexandre that. At least not until the day comes that I can call him my husband instead.

Have you had word from your Henri recently? He is in my nightly prayers along with my dear friend, Lawrence. Perhaps 1917 will be the year that this dreadful war finally comes to its end.

Alexandre has shown so much improvement since Doctor Conrad took over his care, as have all the other three men that he agreed to oversee the care of. My nemesis, Doctor Tyler, is gone from this hospital. Where he has gone, I do not know, but I hope he is in a position where he will do more good than harm.

I must sign off for now. The head matron overheard Alexandre wish me a happy birthday and the dear woman has managed to produce a flan for us to share. She has an amazing touch even with ingredients like tinned milk and what the men call bully beef to work with.

Votre cousine dévouée,

Millicente

Lawrence,

First, let me apologize for my penmanship. My hands are steadier than they were even two weeks past, but still tremble badly. However, Millicent insisted that I will never improve if I do not practice, so here I am and you will have to put up with the eyestrain you are bound to get from reading this. As you are well aware from past experience, Millicent is a force of nature in her own right.

Second, I must thank you a second time for the ring your purchased on my behalf. She has accepted both the ring and myself, so we will be wed sometime next year. I hope the world and circumstances will be such that you will be able to join us that day as you have been such a good friend to us both.

Millicent received a parcel from her school and is currently doing schoolwork at a nearby desk, which she will send back for grading. She has already expressed a desire to add a postscript to this letter, so I will call her over now as my hand is near its limit.

As always, head down and powder dry, my friend. While I want to see you again, I do not want it to be in a hospital setting.

Alexander

Dear Lawrence,
As you can see from the letter above - which I am not reading, merely commenting on the penmanship - Alexander has come a long way. He still has a hard journey ahead of him, no doubt, but I shall be forever grateful to Lady Ann for introducing us to Doctor Conrad. If ever there was a saint in the form of a mortal man, it is he. He is compassionate, yet firm and not afraid to force a bit of pain if he believes the end result will be worth the cost. Every man here now under his care is so much better in both bodies and spirits. He is also not afraid of trying out new methods of doing things. I had always heard the term that one cannot teach an old dog a new trick, but whoever wrote that line never met Doctor Conrad. Should our Lord grant me as long a life as his, I can only pray that I reach that age with my mind still as sharp as his.

Alexander said he made small mention of my schoolwork. Dear Lady Anne made arrangements for it to be shipped to me so that I could extend my time here without risking my graduation next year. I know the time will come, sooner than I should iike, when I must return to Thun and complete my education. However, I hope to see Alexander stronger and better able to fend for himself before that time arrives.

I will sign off for now as it is nearly meal time. You remain in my thoughts and prayers.

With fondest regards,

Millicent

From : Thun, Switzerland

February 11, 1917

My dear Millicent,

We are missing you dreadfully here at school. Your spirit is much like a candle in a dim room - you don't truly appreciate how much light it gives until it is gone. I miss your guidance and wish I had it a the moment. One of my aunts has written me in hopes that I can talk some sense into my father. Father has already broken mourning before even the passing of the first year, let alone the two year period that is expected in our circles. Aunt Mary considers it a blot on the family name that he is already seeking to court again, but I do not see how she expects me to influence him when he does not even speak with me on trivial matters, never mind matters of greater weight.

I apologize for not beginning this letter by congratulating you on your engagement. I will continue on instead of rewriting this as the Headmistress is now taking very dim view of anything that smacks of waste. even of personal items such as stationery. She has scolded more than one of our fellows for wasting paper and ink if she spots an unfinished letter in the waste baskets. She has even taken Viveka to task over her drawings, though not to the point of telling her she cannot continue to draw. Which reminds me, Viveka has asked me to enclose a drawing for Mister Waverly to brighten up his hospital and I will put it in the mail along with this letter.

Speaking of the mail, the Headmistress received your bundle of schoolwork. Our instructress, Miss Harriet, was involved in checking over your work and, while I am sure you will be receiving formal notification later, I thought you would like to know that Miss Harriet said that you were still at the expected level or beyond for your academic classes. In fact, she seems to feel if you are only able to return for your examinations, you will graduate as expected. She has no doubt you will pass your examinations as you have always done well on them in the past.

For myself, I have been recalling your advice and take several deep breaths before attempting to
conjugate my French. While it still gives me more trouble than when you are here to explain them to me, I have been holding my own. In fact, Madame Sabine actually said that my accent has improved from abysmal to tolerable - words I had never thought I would hear come from her lips.

I miss you so much, but I know that you are where you both need and wish to be. Do remember to take care of your own health as well as that of Mister Waverly. If time permits, send a note now and then to keep me informed of how his health is progressing. I shall keep you both in my nightly prayers.

Your ever devoted friend,

Ermengarde

From: Abu Markha, Wadi Ais
March 13, 1917

Alexander,

As you can see from my own penmanship, there is no need to apologize for your own. Our Millicent is wise for her years and following her advice will doubtless do you well.

I wish I had a Millicent myself to give me aid. I have been quite feverish with what is called coastal dysentery and have boils that have broken out all across my back. Sleep is elusive and my exhaustion is not aiding in fighting off this illness, I fear. My condition has also given me a stench that I can barely stand myself - I do not know how anyone else can stand to be near me for long.

If only the headaches would subside for a time to let me rest. I do not have the strength for a long letter - God willing, I will write a more substantial one when I recover. I have been told that it is now two days since I wrote the date at the top of this page. I beg you keep me in your prayers.

T.E.L.

From: Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank
March 26, 1917

My darling Ermengarde,

Thank you for your good wishes. I hope that you do not mind that I slipped a small note into your letter for you to pass on to dear Viveka. Her drawings are so cunning and the sight of the one that she sent did so brighten Alexander's mood tremendously on a day when his treatment had been particularly hard to bear.

I am also sending along my next packet containing the school assignments that I have been able to complete. I am so happy that your French has improved and I hope you are beginning to realize that you are far more clever than you give yourself credit for. As for my own French, Adelaide has faithfully visited me at least once a week and while she is here, the three of us speak nothing but French. She also brings small books of French poetry with her and is very patient with instructing me on the words and phrases that are new to me. With Alexander joining in on the lessons, they are quite enjoyable and give him some much needed variety to his days here.

Does it sound strange that I still have moments when it is hard to believe that I am an engaged
woman? There are times when part of me believes that it was merely a happy dream, but the ring resting on my finger reassures me that it is no figment of my overactive imagination. Perhaps that is the one of the reasons rings began to be given.

Alexander's health is still fragile, but he is gaining ground daily. That is not simply my hopeful thoughts, but words spoken by both the nurses and Doctor Conrad. I noticed that you did not make mention of your own health and hope that you did not catch a chill in the early spring.

Your continued prayers on our behalf are humbly appreciated and do be assured that you are in ours as well.

Your devoted friend,

Millicent

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From : Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank

April 2, 1917

Dear Lawrence,

I read your letter out loud to Alexander when it arrived. We are so sorry to hear of your suffering and it pains us to think of the primitive conditions that you have been living in. Have you managed to get to any type of hospital or are you trying to recover from your illness while still living in a tent in that awful heat? You have always remained in our prayers, but we will add more prayers for you to regain your health.

While part of me wishes that you could be sent here to England to recover, I asked the Head Matron about your ailment and she regretfully told me that, in your current condition, the strain of the journey would do you more harm than good.

I seem to recall that you keep track of the political situation in Ireland, so I have included newspaper clippings from some older issues I found here at the hospital. They concern what is being called the Easter Rising that occurred almost a year ago now. In reading them over, I find it terribly sad. The majority of those killed and wounded were not involved in either the uprising or the suppression, but were merely innocents who were in a bad place at the worst time. As if the dreadful war wasn't already demanding a steep price in blood.

My apologies for the dark turn of my correspondence. I will turn the paper and pen over to Alexander so that he may write a few lines.

With continued prayers for your recovery,

Millicent

_________________________

Lawrence,

I trust that by the time our letter finds its way to you that your condition will be greatly improved. If it comes down to be a thing that determination and force of will can overcome, then I know you will recover. I've met very few men with the inner drive that you have.

As you advised, I am listening to our Millicent's directions. She consults often with the Head Matron and the other nurses, taking as much of the care of my daily needs off of
them as she can so that they may direct their energies to the other hospitalized men. She seems so much older than her years, but I suppose much of that is from her mother, who raised her, quite frankly, more as a companion than as a daughter. Perhaps she had an intuition that Millicent would need to be on her own at a young age.

Regardless of the root of it, I am grateful for her steadiness. She is so unwaveringly confident of my recovery that I cannot help but think of it as a fact as well.

I wish we could give you our assurances in person, but do not forget that you have two people firmly on your side. If there is anything either of us might provide to assist you, please do not hesitate to let us know and be assured that we would do all in our power to obtain it for you.

I'm still holding you to those pints once the war is over.

Looking forward to that day,

Alexander

From : Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank
April 8, 1917
Lawrence,

While we wrote only a few days ago, we could not let any more time pass before writing these words - the Americans have joined the war effort. Perhaps I am being overly optimistic, but I really believe that their entry will turn the tide against the Kaiser and his allies.

Millicent is clipping the related articles from the Times, the Manchester Guardian, and the Clarion to enclose with this brief note. We hope the articles are as heartening to you as they were to us.

In hope of brighter days in the offing,

Alexander

From : Vaucluse, France
April 21, 1917
Ma très chers Millicente et Alexandre,

Joyeux anniversaire, Alexandre! If I recall correctly what my dear Papa said, you have just turned twenty-five. There was perhaps not a chance to célébrer since you are still in the hospital, but I hope the day was at least pleasant for you.

Papa and I are in good health, but I fear the same cannot be said of my Henri. He is coming home again - this time for good. I do not know the details and am not sure that I wish to hear them, but mon cher Henri has lost his left arm. As soon as he returns to us, we will have our wedding. If nothing else, this war has given the hard lessons that we can never know what tomorrow will bring and so, we must take our pleasures as we may.

I will confess to you that I do not know how to feel. While part of me is distressed that poor Henri has been injured once again, part of me cannot help but feel relieved that this time, they will not send
him back into the fighting. I feel horrid for thinking that way, but it is the truth.

Even though I had originally hoped that you and Alexandre would be able to attend our wedding, I beg for your understanding why Henri and I will be wed without any fuss. I wish you both only the best and look forward to the day when we may all meet at last.

Je ne manquerai pas de penser à toi dans mes prières,

Cerise

From : Millbank, Westchester Borough, Greater London

May 17, 1917

Mon cher cousin Cerise,

Thank you for the birthday wishes. Having Millicente here with me made the day a happy one. My hands are getting steadier so I have hope that you will be able to read these words without too much difficulty.

Please do not feel bad about having mixed feelings over Henri. Speaking from experience, I daresay he is having many of the same jumbled emotions himself. Be honest with one another and work through it together. Millicent has done that for me and I have found there is a great deal of truth in the old saying about a burden shared being a burden halved.

My doctor has arrived and so I will turn the remainder of this letter over to Millicent. I also look forward to all of us meeting after the war.

Alexandre

Ma très chère Cerise,

Let me say first that, of course, I understand completely that you and Henri will want to be wed as soon as possible, I am sure that your steady presence will be of immeasurable help to him as he adjusts back to civilian life.

If I may pass along a bit of advice that I was given by the Head Matron, take anything that Henri says that is in anger with a grain of salt. The odds are that what he is angry with is the new limitations he must learn to deal with. She told me that men often express frustration as anger and, I must admit, Alexandre has done so on occasion. It is rare when it occurs, but memorable. I should hate to be anyone that he was ever genuinely angry at.

I have a very good feeling that it will not be that much longer before the day comes when I can greet you with a kiss on the cheek.

A’ la recherche d’ un avenir brilliant,

Millicente

From : Palmyra, Zor Sanjak

June 16, 1917
Alexander and Millicent,

Obviously, I survived my bout with coastal dysentery, although at the time I had felt that it was the end for me. Between my illness and learning of the Sykes-Picot Treaty, I must admit that I was thoroughly fed up and I very nearly decided to simply ride north and abandon the Arab Revolt, as they are now calling it.

I am still at it, however. I firmly believe that the Ottoman Empire must fall and be driven from these lands. What happens once the Ottomans are finally expelled is something I am trying hard not to dwell on while we are pressed with the more immediate needs of the present. In moments when I think too much, I feel as if I am part of a terrible fraud against these people.

I am thinking too deeply again for my own good, so I will push those concerns aside to thank you for the clippings as well as your prayers. Both did my morale a world of good at a time when I needed it badly. I will be frank and state that both sides are worn from the continuous battle, so the influx of men who are not so weary with the world may well be what finally turns the battle. I most sincerely hope so.

I will sign off wishing you both well and for your recovery to continue to progress, Alexander. You are both often in my thoughts.

T.E.L.

From : Vaucluse, France
June 30, 1917

Ma très chères Millicente et Alexandre,

For the very first time, I am writing as Madame Bissette instead of Mademoiselle Doucet. Mon cher Henri and I were wed this morning, so I am a June bride as was my sainte mère. Dear Papa cried, but he has gained a son - Henri has said he will remain at our family home as Papa needs help. Even though his health is still good, with the passing years, he does not move as well as he once did. Papa had even insisted that Henri and I take over the room that was once his and Mama's and he will move into what was my room - à mon embarrass, Papa has already begun hinting for petits enfants.

I must be brief as I am supposed to be resting for tonight. Our neighbors are coming, bringing what food they can spare and to dance with us. My dear god mother is determined that she will find a way to make a croquembouche. I have not so much as seen one since the war began, so I do not know how she will manage such a thing.

I must thank you as well, Millicente, for the advice of the Head Matron that you shared. Henri seems to be as I imagine your Alexendre to be as he prefers to keep his problems to himself. Once I was able to convince him that my desire to share his troubles were sincere, it was as if a weight fell from his shoulders and he wept on my shoulder for nearly an hour while I held him.

Thank the Head Matron for me a thousand times.

Avec amour et gratitude,

Cerise Bissette
From : Cairo, Egypt

July 10, 1917

Alexander and Millicent,

I cannot, of course, give details, but I can give the good news that Aqaba has been taken back from the Ottomans. The other news, that Greece has entered the war as one of the Allied Nations, has likely already reached you. The Americans and the Greeks may be late to this fight, but they are most heartily welcome in my books.

It is likely small of me, but I rather enjoyed the stir I caused when I came into Cairo earlier today. I hadn't bothered to change from my Bedouin robes or keffiyeh and, to be frank, likely smelled greatly of my camel. I do believe a few of our fellow Brits nearly jumped out of their skins when I spoke - they obviously were not prepared for an Oxford accent coming from a man in robes atop a camel.

Forgive me for taking my merriment where I can as I will likely be stuck inside attending meetings and writing reports for several days. Life in a tent or on camel back may not be glamorous, but it certainly looks good in comparison to endless reams of paperwork. I already feel impatient to be on the move again. Perhaps a friend was right when they suggested that I must have been born with a restless soul.

Still, I cannot help but be optimistic. I feel as if the tide is finally turning and, even though this war cannot end quickly enough and more lives will be lost, I believe the end is within our grasp at last. When the day comes that we meet over pints, I know I will have many stories for you and trust you will be have an equally abundant amount to share with me.

T.E.L.

Author's Note : For T. E. Lawrence fans who may be reading this, I am aware that he used the spelling Akaba for Aqaba, but I opted to go with the spelling that can be used to Google the region for folks who might be wanting more details than I give in these short letters (for one thing, military details would not have gone into normal correspondence *g*).

From : Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank

August 3, 1917

Dear Lawrence,

It is good to hear you sounding so much like yourself again. From the tone of your letter, Alexander and I get the impression that you have recovered most of your strength after your dreadful illness.

Alexander is doing better and has begun short, daily walks. The walks are all confined to indoors, but he can manage with the use of a cane. He is frustrated that taking a deep breath is still not possible, but I can understand being impatient to be well again. And he will be well again, even if not to the standards he held for himself prior to his injuries. While pleased with Alexander's overall progress, Doctor Conrad is doubtful that he will recover enough to return to active duty.
I must admit laughing out loud when I imagined the looks on the faces of the British officers in Cairo when you spoke to them. I cannot help but share your optimism as we have of late received more good news than bad. I will turn this letter over to Alexander now.

Fondly,

Millicent

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Lawrence,

Glancing over what Millicent has written, I see she has already filled you in with my progress or lack thereof. I know the current weather outdoors would not do my lungs any good, but it seems forever and a day since I was able to be outside of four walls. However, I will endeavor not to complain as I know that four walls are a luxury to you more days than not.

While I cannot mention who it was by name, enough time has passed that I can mention that an American officer made a quick pass through the hospital in June. Even with the speed he came and went, he managed to say a word or two to every man in the building. If he is an example of the sort that the Americans are sending over, it gives me far more confidence that this war will come to an end before much longer.

As always, keep safe over there, old man.

Alexander

Author note: The officer being alluded to is Major General John Pershing, who left New York in secrecy and arrived in London in June on his way to France. Since he was recorded as visiting military hospitals in France, I stretched that to include a visit to the British ones as well.

From: Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank

September 1, 1917

My darling Ermengarde,

Please do me the great favor of seeing that my mattress is aired and the bedlinens are changed soon as I will be returning to the school to take my tests so that I might graduate in January as I have always planned. Alexander and I have spoken about this at great length and we both feel his recovery has reached the point where I can leave him with the doctor and nurses. It helps greatly that I have a great deal of faith in Doctor Conrad.

Alexander and I will be wed in February as Doctor Conrad is quite certain that Alexander will be able to travel by then and he heartily recommends the climate of Switzerland as being good for the continued healing of Alexander's lungs. There is a clinic no more than an hour's ride from our school where Alexander will be admitted on an out-patient basis. His military commander has signed off on this as he has reviewed Alexander's medical files with Doctor Conrad and agrees that Alexander will never recover enough to return to active duty status. That prognosis is a grim one for a man as used to being active as Alexander, but Doctor Conrad assures us both that, if Alexander sticks with his
course of rehabilitation therapy, there will very little he will be unable to do.

I have so many wedding preparations to make that I hope I can properly focus on my classes. I am trusting that you will help me keep on track. At least I need not worry about my wedding attire. Lady Anne had her own dressmaker take my measurements and has insisted on taking care of the gown as her engagement present to me. I have no worries about what it will look like as I have seen many examples of her excellent taste in everything from china to presentation gowns.

We must have measurements taken for yourself and Viveka as well and sent to Lady Anne. The two of you are the only attendants I care to have. I wanted to ask you in person, but if I wait until then, the measurements might not make it to the dressmaker in time. Please give the enclosed note to Viveka and I do hope you both accept. I have missed you both so much and look forward to seeing you with my own eyes again very soon.

I feel I am rambling and I will save all else to say to you face-to-face.

Looking forward to seeing you very soon,

Millicent

From : Ancre, France

September 10, 1917

My dearest Alexander,

I have safely made it to this point. It is ironic that Lady Anne made arrangements for me to travel with a group of nuns considering the circumstances we met under, but I am finding the sisters that I am with are more worldly than I had thought nuns to be. Of course, the fact that I am traveling with a group of nuns dedicated to providing schooling and medical aid for the poor may be what is making the difference.

Travel is far slower than it was coming to you and the paperwork needed to go anywhere is not only voluminous, but it seems a dozen people need to look over it all before you can move forward. Were I a private citizen traveling without having had the assistance of someone with Lady Anne's connections, I do not know that returning to Switzerland would even have been possible at this time.

Oddly enough, I have not needed to use my French much as nearly everyone outside of my travel group that I have come in contact with has either been British or American. While I know we have a common language, I wonder if the Americans have as much trouble understanding me as I have understanding them?

I shall breathe a sigh of relief when I finally reach the school and I look forward to receiving the letter you promised to send. As many delays as I am experiencing, I do believe that it will reach the school before I do.

Please rest assured that I am taking all precautions that you advised me to and I am never without the knife you gave me. I even take it with me when attending to personal matters.

Once I reach the school, I shall write again. Take care of yourself, my dearest.

All of my love,

Millicent
From : Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank

September 14, 1917

My darling Millicent,

It has not even been two weeks since you departed, but it seems much longer. Doctor Conrad had a bit of a laugh over my, as he called it, hang-dog expression and told me that your absence should be all the motivation that I need to do my utmost at my exercises to assure that I am able to travel to Switzerland in time to witness your graduation. I believe he has the right of that.

I must say that I am not the only one who misses your presence. Everyone from the Head Matron to the nurses' aides have remarked on your absence and have inquired about you. When your next letter arrives, I am sure I shall be inundated with demands for updates on your journey.

The one thing keeping my spirits up is the knowledge that this separation will be a short one. Doctor Conrad has already expressed that I should be able to begin my journey after Christmas Day. This gives me hope that I might be able to reach Switzerland in time for your birthday, but if not, I hope that you would not mind a slightly belated celebration of your eighteenth year.

I still recall how you scolded me that day when we first met over being twelve and reminding me that you wouldn't be that age forever. Dear heavens, has that really been only six years ago? It seems like I have aged much more than that since then.

As for yourself, I do not think I would use the word aged. Rather, your body has matured to better match your mind.

I have been informed by the Head Matron that the reconstruction aide that Doctor Conrad requested to work with me has arrived and so I shall sign off.

Missing you terribly and looking forward to the New Year,

Alexander

Author's Note : Physical therapy wasn't well-known outside of Europe prior to WW1 and the first physical therapists were called reconstruction aides. Miss Mary McMillan was born in the US, but raised in England. She learned the benefits of physical therapy from her work with an orthopedic surgeon - Sir Robert Jones - and became the first known physical therapist in the US when she worked at Walter Reed hospital with the soldiers returning wounded from WW1. Yeah - doesn't have a lot to do with the story, but heck - I found it interesting *1*. 

From : Thun, Switzerland

October 2, 1917

My dearest Alexander,

We both may breathe a bit easier. I arrived back at the school today and am thoroughly exhausted. Dear Ermengarde said your letter arrived the day before I did and had it resting on top of my pillow,
but I am using what little energy I have left to write these lines so that you shan't have to wait any longer than necessary to learn of my safe arrival. Reading your letter will give me something to look forward to when I wake.

If I knew a month ago what I know now, I do not know that I would have risked the journey, but as all is well now, there is no real need for second guessing. All that occurred is still too jumbled in my tired brain to even attempt to explain, so for now I will ready this for the morning post and gratefully crawl underneath my comforter.

My thoughts are ever with you as are my prayers.

All of my love always and forever,

Millicent

From: Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank

October 4, 1917

My darling Millicent,

I know that even had you arrived early and sent a letter immediately from your school that it would not have arrived yet, but I cannot help feeling a touch impatient. I have received the letter you sent from Ancre and that did ease my thoughts somewhat.

Yes, I must admit that your traveling companions are a touch ironic. Merciful heavens, has it really been over five years since we traveled through France together? I shall have to tell my reconstruction aide, Miss Simpkins, about the hours we spent cycling through the countryside. I should very much like to do that again under pleasanter circumstances.

Speaking of Miss Simpkins, I must say that after our first few sessions, I thought the woman was out to kill me. She made my joints bend whether they were in the mood to or not, then she would heap on heated sandbags on top of them until I thought I was being baked. I thought about telling her to stop, but then I thought about what both you and Doctor Conrad would say about my giving up so soon, gritted my teeth and carried on.

I'm glad that I did. I am no where near finished with the treatments, but my ability to walk is unbelievable better. I have a pronounced limp and am told that I will likely always have at least a slight limp, but I am not shuffling my feet along any longer when I walk. If I continue to improve at this pace, it will make the journey to Switzerland much easier to bear.

Do give my regards to Miss Ermengarde and Miss Viveka. We shall have to think of some trinket we can present to them before the wedding.

Speaking of which, it will only be a bit over three months before I arrive, but it seems like it is much farther away than that at this moment. I wish you luck on your exams, but I very much doubt that you will require any intervention of luck as I well know the number of hours you've spent on keeping up with your lessons.

The time has come for my next reconstruction session, so I will close for now. You are ever in my thoughts, my dear. I believe I will look to the skies tonight for our star.

Your devoted fiance',
From: Thun, Switzerland

October 12, 1917

My dearest Alexander,

I am afraid I must begin with an apology. I am taking this morning to myself to catch up on a few things, but I am uncertain when the next opportunity will come for me to take a deep breath, let alone write a letter of decent length. Every instructor I have seems determined to cram several years worth of teaching into a few days. I find this incomprehensible. I was ahead on my studies before I departed to assist in your care and I have not been away for more than a few days past ten months. Even basic math should indicate that I cannot be years behind on my instruction.

Still, if I wish to graduate on schedule, it is best that I simply go along and devote my energies to my studies instead of wasting my time complaining about that. In the larger scheme, it is more of an annoyance than an obstacle.

I will be quite interested in hearing about your reconstruction sessions. They need to find a more suitable name for it. Reconstruction makes it sound more like you have had problems with your home's roofing more than with your health.

Among my other projects for this morning are getting the needed measurements from Ermengarde and Viveka so that I may post them to Lady Anne along with this letter to you. Did I mention that Lady Anne intends to journey here herself for our ceremony? I am genuinely touched that she is going to such trouble as I recall dear Adelaide saying that Lady Anne is very much a homebody who does not care for traveling abroad.

I suppose I should have mentioned that both Ermengarde and Viveka have agreed to be my attendants. I do not believe I have ever seen Viveka so excited. She has even sketched some quite attractive dress ideas to send along to Lady Anne, which I will include with the measurements. I think they are both appropriate and charming. I have been told my own paintings and drawings ae nice, but next to Viveka's work, my own efforts seem more like stick figures.

After contemplation, I suppose I should be grateful that my instructors are intent on keeping me so busy. It shall serve to help make the time pass quickly.

That reminds me of a question I needed to ask. I already plan to keep your Christmas present here with me as if the package is even slightly delayed, you will be traveling and unable to receive it. Should I keep any letter that I write after the first of December with me as well?

Ermengarde has just tapped my shoulder and reminded me that it is time for our appointment with the school's seamstress who has kindly agreed to take the measurements needed to make the dresses, so I will close for now.

As much as I enjoyed reading your letter, I miss the ability to simply turn around and hold a conversation with you. I hope that it a gift that we never lose as I should hate for us to reach the point where we no longer have anything meaningful to say to one another beyond the simplistic chatting about the weather. While i cannot imagine that occurring between us, I suppose it would be possible if one didn't continue to strive to expand on one's store of knowledge. As we both seem to be the questioning kind, I do not foresee that as a problem.

I am not yet counting the days, but I have already made note of the weeks until I can expect your
From : Thun, Switzerland

October 15, 1917

My dearest Alexander,

It did not dawn on me until after I had already sent my previous letter that I had neglected to make any mention of the journey between England and Switzerland. I have a few minutes to myself today and will endeavor to remedy that omission.

The rains have been dreadful in France this year. From what we could see from the trains, there were large pieces of equipment so sunk in mud that I cannot fathom how they will ever be able to free them. The sisters and I were forced from the train at one point to make room for soldiers and we were unable to continue travel for several days. We were fortunate that the small church in the town allowed us to stay under their roof. Meals were only a thin oatmeal gruel, but at least it was hot and comforting.

We heard dreadful tales about how shell holes are hidden underneath the mud and that soldiers are routinely falling prey to those quagmires and drowning in the mud. The sisters were moved by the tales and begged the local priest to lead them in a requiem mass for those poor souls that have perished since the war's beginning.

While it was a relief when we were finally granted passage back on the trains, I will admit to having had more than one bad moment during the journey. While I do not fancy that I am an overly nervous traveler, being able to hear the sounds of bombs going off in the distance does not make for an easy trip. One of the nuns, Sister Mary Hildegard, was praying under her breath so constantly that she developed laryngitis. I cannot say that it was in vain as the tracks we were traveling on remained intact as did the train itself.

The Headmistress here at the school allowed the sisters to rest here for a week to catch their breath before embarking on the next stage of their journey. I became quite close to some of them and they have promised to send me a letter when they arrive at their final destination.

My brief respite is coming to an end, so I will sign off for now.

All of my love always and forever,

Millicent

From : Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital, Millbank

November 1, 1917

My darling Millicent,

This is really only a cover letter, the remainder of the letter are thoughts that I jotted down as they occurred to me. I will do the same in this coming month and mail it out on the first of December. By
the first of January, I should be traveling to Switzerland.

I am looking evermore forward to the journey.

Your devoted fiance',

Alexander

October 5 - I do not know if you were aware of it, but one of the sisters in your group took a moment to send a telegraph to your guardian to inform her when you had made it back to your school. Lady Anne was then kind enough to send Adelaide here today to give me the news and set my mind at ease. Ironically, I sent you a letter only yesterday, but I suppose that I will be there before our letter writing has a chance to fall back into any sort of rhythm.

October 7 - I thought you might like to know a bit more about Miss Simpkins, my reconstruction aide. Her full name is Juliet Philomena Simpkins and she has a thorough dislike of her middle name. She is engaged to a Captain Harland Hyram Humphries - all I can say about that name is poor fellow. Miss Simpkins is what my father would have termed a sturdy girl and I would be surprised if she was not from farming stock. She is a strong woman and has a formidable disposition. Thankfully, her personality tends toward the sunnier side and the two of us get along quite well now that I can see the results from her sessions which, quite frankly, are often torturous. She and Doctor Conrad are quite pleased with my progress and I have been told that next week, I will graduate to taking daily walks outside when the weather permits.

October 10 - I am relaying a message to you from Lieutenant Brannon, who you may recall was in the same ward as I was when you first arrived. He will not be allowed to return to the lines, but he is being released from the hospital today and, though he is making use of crutches still, he is leaving under his own power. He wanted me to thank you most heartily for being the driving force behind Doctor Conrad coming here. His treatment of us as patients instead of as hopeless cases made all the difference for those of us here. I have been asked more than once for the address to your school, so you may well get some thank you notes from some of the other chaps here.

October 14 - Miss Simpkins and I took a long walk outside today. It is remarkable how so little a thing has improved my mood so tremendously. I felt a trifle unsteady, but she encouraged me to do without the cane as much as possible and I find that I can make do without it for short periods. It is still frustrating how easily I tire, but she showed me the chart she had made showing my progress. The progress is slow, yes - but the important thing is that it is steady. She has promised me a treat of some sort if I do well with my exercises this week. She knows me well enough now to know that curiosity over what she has in mind will drive me more than the treat itself.

October 17 - The weather has been absolutely dreadful since yesterday and my joints were aching so badly that I thoroughly enjoyed the hot sandbag treatment this morning. I was feeling much better afterward and my mood improved more when your note from October 2 arrived. Please do not fret yourself if you do not have time to write letters. I know that there is much to be done between now and the first of the year. Just a word or two and your name on a postcard would be sufficient and it is likely a bit greedy for me to even ask that much, but I will ask it of you regardless
October 20 - The weather has not only dried out, but today was unseasonably warm which lead to my treat. Miss Simpkins gave me directions to a nearby pub that is still serving pub lunches. She laid out real clothing and shoes for me (I have not had on anything more substantial than a robe and slippers since my arrival here), and gave me my orders. I was to stroll leisurely to the pub, order whatever I liked - though I had to limit myself to one pint of drink, then I was to eat my lunch without rush followed by a leisurely stroll back. It was her belief that I had reached the stage where a bit of independence would do me a world of good.

She was right. Being able to step out onto the sidewalk and feel like a man instead of a patient was a heady feeling, my girl. The only thing that could possibly have improved it was if you had been by my side, but I take heart that when I arrive there, you and I shall be able to take a pleasant stroll without you needing to support me. While I know that you would do so gladly, I will admit to enough masculine vanity that it pleases me greatly to know that you won't need to.

October 21 - I halfway expected more than my usual aches and pains after yesterday's excursion, but I was pleasantly surprised to find that was not the case. The pubman, Anston Baker, proved to be a former soldier who lost the lower portion of his left leg early in the war and it was heartening to see how well he had adjusted. Due to the wartime restrictions, the meal was simple, but well cooked. The eggs and chips plate reminded me of some of the meals on the field, except that the eggs were hot and not a bit rubbery. I nursed both my meal and my pint to last nearly an hour and Mister Baker was an excellent host, conversing with me as if the common thread of having been soldiers made us the equivalent of old friends. I shall certainly be giving his establishment more business in the future.

October 25 - It seems my last words were prophetic. Doctor Conrad and Miss Simpkins were both quite pleased with my improved morale and renewed dedication to my exercise regimen. I will now be allowed to take lunch away from the hospital whenever I feel the urge so long as I do not miss any scheduled appointments. Another bit of independence back and I must say that I am feeling far more like my old self than I have in quite some time.

October 31 - Another month gone. Tomorrow, I will post this to you in hopes that its arrival finds you well. Your letter of October 12 arrived yesterday. Your plan not to mail anything to me is a wise one. I will put your present amongst my luggage and we will have a combined celebration of Christmas, New Years and your birthday after my arrival if that thought is pleasing to you. Tonight promises to be clear and I plan to remain awake long enough to view our star as I long for the day we will view it again side by side.

From: Thun, Switzerland

November 19, 1917

My dearest Alexander,

My apologies for the long delay between letters. Our school has been under a precautionary quarantine since shortly after my last letter until yesterday due to an outbreak of typhus that is believed to have had its source in some newly arrived prisoners of war to the region. The outbreak was fortunately quickly contained by severe delousing efforts. Our school's population underwent delousing as well as a precautionary measure. Whether the delousing was needed or now, our school
escaped the outbreak, so I cannot say that it was not worth the effort.

Needless to say, this meant no mail coming or leaving during that period, so I received your letter of October 4 yesterday. I must say that a long cycling trip through the countryside without having to worry about hiding sounds marvelous.

I do hope that Miss Simpkins and I have the opportunity to meet one day. She sounds like a woman that I could enjoy a lengthy conversation with.

For Viveka and Ermengarde, I am thinking that a brooch would be appropriate. Something with a classic styling that would be suitable for most occasions like a cameo perhaps.

We have free time today since all of our school's staff have been isolated with us these past three weeks and all wanted to get out to attend to personal matters, which gave us the day off. We shall be back to our studies tomorrow. In fact, I will be having the first of my examinations tomorrow in French. Dear Adelaide helped me keep up with usage enough that I think I will do quite well. Dear Ermengarde still gets terribly flustered with her French which I cannot comprehend because she does quite well when she doesn't fret.

Some days seem to fly past while others creep at a snail's pace. Still, the passing of each brings closer the day of your arrival. Do give my regards to Doctor Conrad and Miss Simpkins.

All of my love always,

Millicent

From : Millbank, Westchester Borough, Greater London

December 1, 1917

My darling Millicent,

I am sure that the first thing you will notice is my change of address. I will explain that below, but I think I should mention that once you receive this, it would be best not to send any further letters. They would be highly unlikely to reach me and I would not want to inconvenience anyone with the task of forwarding my mail to me.

Your letter dated on the nineteenth of November arrived two days ago. On reading through it, I was quite relieved when I saw your suggestion for what to give your attendants. One of the places my walks take me past is a charming little shop whose proprietor has managed to remain in business despite this being a difficult time for those that sell more frivolous items. Among his selection are a variety of Italian cameos and I impulsively purchased a pair that I thought might do well. They each depict the three Graces. The framework surrounding them is gold and fashioned to resemble leafy vines. At the top of the brooch, the vines have been fashioned so that a chain might be used if they wished to wear it as a pendant.

I will, of course, be bringing them with me and we should have adequate time to choose something different should you feel these will not do for the purpose. Pleasant to think that this will be the final letter that I post before I arrive.

On an unrelated note, my aunt confessed to me what she had mailed to you instead of what I had requested. I am absolutely mortified by her actions. Had I been given any indication of her thoughts on the matter, I should never have entrusted her with that. I cannot apologize enough for the awkward position that package placed you in, but I thank you most sincerely for the discrete way in
which you handled it.

Your devoted fiance',

Alexander

November 3 - I have decided to take full advantage of my mid-day freedom and I am going for a walk every day when it is not raining whether I intend to eat lunch out or not. The short respite of wearing real clothing and glancing in the store windows is doing wonders for my morale.

November 6 - One ward of the hospital is under quarantine due to an outbreak of what the nurses are terming a purulent bronchitis. Myself and three other men who suffered lung damage from gasses are being moved out of the hospital into a nearby boarding house until the disease has passed and the wards are fumigated.

November 7 - You will be interested to know that I am now staying in the same room that you resided in for a time. Mrs. Nolan is the owner of the boarding house that agreed to take us in. She and I had quite a delightful conversation over tea while her daughter Adelaide was visiting. Both ladies have asked that I send you their regards and Mrs. Nolan mentioned that you were one of the pleasantest boarders that she has had under her roof.

November 9 - Since I am still forbidden to enter the hospital, Miss Simpkins paid a visit to my boarding house and, with Mrs. Nolan's permission, made use of the parlor to work on the prescribed exercises for the four of us. She remarked that all of us had much better coloration and complimented Mrs. Nolan, giving her full credit for our improvement. That seemed to please Mrs. Nolan a great deal.

November 14 - Doctor Conrad stopped by to give each of us a quick examination. He also complimented Mrs. Nolan on the excellent care she has been taking of us and then requested to extend our stays. It seems that while we have been her guests, there has been a rather large influx of patients and the wards are close to capacity. As the four of us have reached the stage where we need rest and therapy rather than full time medical attention, Doctor Conrad asked for and received permission to continue to house us here if Mrs. Nolan is willing - and thankfully, she is.

November 19 - My daily walks in addition to Miss Simpkins' regime and Mrs. Nolan's wholesome cooking have worked wonders. My limp remains, but it is far less pronounced than it once was and my pace has increased to the point where I can actually mean that I am walking rather than slowly strolling along.

November 23 - One thing that I miss about the hospital is the war news that would come through on a regular basis. From what newspapers we have been able to see, my former commanding officer, General Allenby, is doing remarkable well in Palestine. I hope the war is on its last legs and pray that we will not see another such in our lifetimes.

November 28 - Doctor Conrad has given me the best medicine of all. The official paperwork and travel arrangements for my transfer to the Swiss clinic have all been approved and I shall be departing here on Boxing Day. Of course, the travel time between here and there may well be lagged as yours was, but at least I shall be on my way in less than a month.
Author's note : Today (2/16/2017) marks the fifth year anniversary of the launch of this line. I've learned a remarkable amount about World War I while researching for these letters and, I hope, provided a bit of entertainment along the way. Only a few more letters left before this series finally reaches the end. My appreciation to those who have followed and encouraged over all these years.

From : Thun, Switzerland

December 10, 1917

Ma très chère Cerise,

I now have a date to give you for when Alexander and I shall wed. It will be on February 1st of next year. While I realize such a thing might not be possible, I do hope there is a chance that you, your Henri and Uncle Lucien might be able to attend. I should like nothing better than for Uncle Lucien to escort me down the aisle.

It seems odd to think that in less than two months, I will be joining you in the ranks of married women. To paraphrase du Musset, je ne sais pas où va mon chemin, mais je sais que je marche mieux quand je tiens la main.

I apologize for the brevity of this letter. Please give my regards to both Uncle Lucien and your Henri.

Votre cousine dévouée,

Millicente

translation of the French : I don't know where my road is going, but I know that I walk better when I hold his hand. The original phrase by du Mosset was "Je ne sais où va mon chemin, mais je sais que je marche mieux quand ma main serre la tienne" (basically changing 'hold your hand' to 'hold his hand')

From : Thun, Switzerland

December 10, 1917

Dear Lawrence,

I hesitated to write to you as my feelings were torn. On one hand, knowing as I do the unlikelihood of you being able to leave where you are at this tumultuous time, it feels improper to send you an invitation. However, I would rather you know that your presence is desired than to have you think otherwise.

Alexander and I will be wed here in Thun on the first of February of the coming year. It will be a very small affair which well suits us both. If circumstances change in ways we cannot yet foresee, your presence would, of course, be most welcome.

I hope this letter finds you well and that the illnesses that have plagued you in the past grant you
respite. You remain in my thoughts and my nightly prayers for your safety.

Fondly,

Millicent

From : Vaucluse, France

December 22, 1917

Ma très chère Millicente,

I am delighted to write that Papa is most determined that we two will be there when you and Alexandre wed. Henri does not feel that he will be up to the trip, but will remain behind to keep an eye on our home.

Papa says we will leave about the middle of January to make sure that we have adequate time to reach you in case there are delays. I am, of course, looking forward to seeing you and Alexandre, but I must confess excitement incontrôlable. It will sound silly to you as much as you have traveled, mon cher - but I? I have never been outside of France. Traveling and getting to see Switzerland feels like a grande aventure.

I feel chills when I think that we may well be together in the same room by this time next month.

Je t'embrasse de votre cousine,

Cerise

From : Euston Rd, Kings Cross, London

December 26, 1917

My darling Millicent,

I arrived at King's Cross Station a bit early and am currently awaiting the train. While it seems a bit odd to be writing you a letter that shall, in all likelihood, not arrive until well after I do, I find some things are easier for me to express in the written word rather than verbally, so I ask your indulgence in this matter.

I do not believe that my memory of that April morning in 1912 will ever fade. Your eyes when you first looked up at me were a shade of blue I had seen depicted in paintings, but had never encountered in real life. I could tell from their intensity that you were sizing me up and, I must confess, even though I had no idea yet who you were at that moment, I found myself worried that I would fall short of your expectations.

I will also confess that I had that same fear a year ago. You may well view it as ludicrous, but I had a deep fear that you would see the ring and then inform me that, while you were fond of me, you loved me like a brother. Needless to say, I was both relieved and pleased that such was not the case.

I have glanced at my watch and find I must sign off now if I am to post this before I board the train. Soon, my dear girl. Very soon, yet not soon enough. I will do my best to curb my impatience so that I do not overly annoy my fellow travelers.

Your devoted fiancé,
Alexander

From: Aqaba

December 29, 1917

Millicent,

As you can see from where this was posted, time and fate have landed me back in Aqaba for a bit. I received your letter only yesterday and please don't fret the tiniest bit over my feeling, dear girl. As you suspected, it will be quite impossible for me to journey to the wedding, but I will always hold a special place for both you and Alexander. I hope this package reaches you before the wedding. I know the Christmas and birthday presents within will be late, but we are entirely dependent on the Navy for mail services these days as the trade routes are, to put it bluntly, a bloody mess. The well wishes were on time even if the posting was not.

While traveling here, I had the fortune to be at Jerusalem at an opportune time and was able to witness General Allenby's official entrance into that ancient city. Modern equipment of warfare seem so out of place in such a historic locale or at least it was so to my eyes.

I received a letter from my family telling about how Arnie is doing in school. Dear heavens, that world seems so far removed from the world I now live in. It pains me to think that he is the only younger brother I have remaining.

Let me turn away from those thoughts and assure you that I am far more optimistic about the war coming to an end than I was a year ago. Part of that feeling might well be because my health is far better, but I truthfully believe a turning point has been passed though I am sure that there will be more battles before we come to the end of this long tunnel.

I will be keeping you and Alexander in my thoughts and do make sure to save me at least one photograph of you as a married couple. I still have great hopes that we three will be able to sit around a table together and have a convivial chat around a meal that does not resemble rations even vaguely.

All my best wishes for you on your impending marriage. Tell Alexander for me that he is a truly fortunate man.

T.E.L.
From : Ancre, France

January 1, 1918

My darling Millicent,

Happy eighteenth birthday, my dear girl. As you can see from my heading, I am currently experiencing a similar delay as you did in September and in the same location. I shall hopefully arrive in Thun before this letter, but more delays could be forthcoming.

At least we are on the same continent again, if not the same country yet. I was informed that our delay here should last no longer than a day or two, so I should arrive in three to four days. Were it not for the threats of bombs and the difficulty of crossing borders, I should likely have made better time on bicycle than I am making by rail.

Not that I thought that you were, but you were certainly not exaggerating about the large amount of paperwork needed to get anywhere or the number of British and Americans one encounters while traveling. It seems as if every time I start to use French, I need to stop and switch back to English.

It was a bit embarrassing when my luggage was searched and they examined the two rather elaborate dresses among my things. Lady Anne decided it was best to send Miss Ermengarde and Miss Viveka's dresses for the wedding along with me in hopes that a local seamstress can do any necessary adjustments. Your gown has remained in her care as she believes that a groom should not view his bride's dress until she is walking down the aisle toward him. For myself, I only care that the dress is to your liking. It is the woman inside the dress and not the dress itself that I plan to wed.

Only one month remaining of bachelor life for the pair of us, my girl. I do not believe I shall miss it in the least.

Your devoted fiance',

Alexander

From : Thun, Switzerland

January 9, 1918

Lawrence,

Well, old fellow, I've finally made it to Switzerland. There was a time or two that I began to think I would have to walk or find a bicycle to reach Millicent, but we have finally been reunited. It never fails to amaze me when I see her again. I have an image of her fixed in my head, but it never does her justice. I suppose that is because her image does not have the spark of her wit to it.

Tomorrow, Millicent is going to introduce me to the man of the cloth that has agreed to perform our ceremony and I will also get to see where our wedding will take place. I had no idea that so many old churches were in the region, but I have been informed that there are around a dozen churches in the vicinity of Lake Thun that are a thousand years old or older. By the tale, sometime about 930, Rudolf II kept having the same dream and summoned a minister to him to interpret the dream for him. The minister said the dream meant that the king was to build a dozen churches. The king, being
a God-fearing man, obeyed and one of those twelve churches was built in Thun. Our wedding has been approved to take place on the grounds of Scherzline Church and we will be allowed to have the ceremony inside if the weather turns foul.

I did not really take the opportunity to explore much of Thun on my previous visits, so I will be taking some of the time between now and the wedding to see the town. It is far older than I had originally thought, so I am sure I will find a great deal to keep me occupied.

When I write next, I will be a married man. You are in our thoughts and prayers, my friend.

Alexander

From : Thun, Scotland
February 1, 1918
To: Mrs. Avelina Chapman, London, England

Dear Aunt Avelina,

I will be wed in a few hours and, as I am endeavoring to keep out of the way since tradition holds that I may not view my bride-to-be until she approaches the altar, I thought I would occupy myself with a bit of correspondence.

I did not hear it from Millicent, but a woman in charge of soliciting donations for missionary work approached me once she learned who I was and asked me to accept thanks on your behalf for the large number of religious tracts you sent that they have made use of. Since I never requested any such things be sent and I know better than most your usual lack of religious fervor, I am left to presume that you sent the items to Millicent as an intended insult.

While it should not be necessary for me to elaborate, I am doing so to insure there is no misunderstanding between us. While I shall endeavor to overlook this past incident, I will not tolerate any disrespect toward Millicent in the future. As my wife, she will be mistress over all of my holdings, including our family home in London. You are welcome to remain there as our guest, but if you choose to continue to live under our roof, you will - at minimum - maintain a civil relationship with my wife.

As I am fond of you, I have hope that this situation can be considered settled. However, if you feel that standard of behavior that I require is not acceptable to you, I will contact the family lawyer and arrange assistance in obtaining new lodgings for you. I expect to have your answer waiting by the time we have returned from our honeymoon.

Your nephew,

Alexander Waverly

From : Thun, Switzerland
February 2, 1918
Dear Lawrence,

I find myself awake at far too early an hour and too restless to return to sleep at the moment.
Therefore, I have crept into the sitting room of the suite we are staying in and lit a candle to write for a bit so that I do not disturb Alexander's rest. He has not complained, but the travel from England to here was obviously very wearing on him and he still tires easily. Still, his stamina is so much greater than it was only a few weeks ago when simply walking across a room would leave him exhausted. I hope the Swiss air does him as much good as dear Doctor Conrad believes.

It just came to me that this is my very first letter as a married woman. Millicent Waverly. I am still becoming used to the sound of that, but I rather like it. It flows rather well even when I toss my middle name into the mix. It does seem fitting that this letter will go to you as you are the one that has known both of us for several years. Nearly five years, in my case. Odd that all three of us have never been together at the same place and time, but we do plan to hold you to that meeting once the war is behind us.

I have not yet mentioned it to Alexander, but my former guardian, Lord William, made a final bid to prevent my wedding. Perhaps it is simply that he has gotten his own way on far too many occasions, but he did not take my rejection well. I was a bit keyed up through our ceremony for fear that he might try and disrupt things, but I believe his fear of Lady Anne likely prevented that. She is quite the formidable grande dame when irritated.

I am not sure how I expected married life would feel and it has, of course, been not even a day, but I feel quite content. That might sound like faint praise, but I have rarely felt content in my life and I am quite certain that this is the first time that I have felt content since my mother's passing. I am happy, in love, and feel as if I have found that place meant for me in this world - by Alexander's side.

Do take care of yourself, Lawrence. Someday, I shall need to name a godfather for my first child and I can think of none better than my brother in all but blood.

With fondest regards,

Millicent Waverly

From : Tafileh, Jordan Valley

February 7, 1918

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Waverly,

You probably took a glance down to the bottom of this letter to see who it was writing to you, didn't you? I could not resist the formal salutation in my first letter to you as a married pair. I apologize for not having written on the date of your nuptials, but things have been a bit busy here. I have not received any mails since the first of the month and am not likely to see any for a bit longer as I am about to leave to do a bit of reconnaissance work. If you have recently written, I doubt I will see it until March or April, but please do not let that dissuade you from writing on occasion. A letter from friends or family do wonders, as well you both know. from personal experience.

I do not recall if I have made mention in the past of how much respect I have for General Allenby. I do not know that I have ever met a man with higher moral standards and he does not only speak the words, he puts them into action. I believe I did make mention of being present when he entered Jerusalem, but I do not believe that I told you that he showed his reverence for the symbolism of the old city by entering through the Jaffa Gate on foot rather than riding on a beast or in a vehicle. That action alone earned him a great deal of respect in this region as Kaiser Wilhelm II's insistence on entering the city on a white horse is still vividly remembered and not in a positive light.
General Allenby and I get along remarkably well and, much to the disappointment of some of my fellow officers, he does not mind one bit that I dress and live with the Arabs. I am thankful for that. Even though living and eating with them has not done my health a great deal of good, embracing their way of life has gained me the type of coin that one cannot find at any bank. The loyalty of the men that ride by my side has already saved my life more than once.

Here I am prattling on about things that are likely very far from your mind - or that should be far from your mind as you begin your married life together. I wish you both much happiness. I will beg your indulgence and postpone presenting you with a wedding present until the day comes that we can sit together and enjoy peace.

Congratulations and again, my best wishes to you both.

T.E.L.

Author's Note: For those looking to explore more about where Lawrence is, the actual spelling is either Tafilah, Talfila or At-Tafilah, a town in southern Jordan. As with previous place names, I've chosen to go with the spelling Lawrence used in his letters and journals.

From: Vaucluse, France

February 16, 1918

Ma très chères Millicente et Alexandre,

As promised, I am writing a quick note to let you know that Papa and I have made it safely home. There is much to do now that we are back, so I will be brief and wish you much joy on your la lune de miel.

Someday very soon, I hope that you will be able to travel here to visit. I believe Henri and Alexandre will becomes friends quickly much as Millicente and I have.

Beaucoup de Bonheur,

Cerise

From: Thun, Switzerland

March 3, 1918

Ma très chère Cerise,

Alexandre and I returned today and found the note from you. Merci beaucoup for letting us know you and dear Uncle Lucien made it to your home safely. We had been worried and your note was a great relief.

We are starting to get settled in a small house, more of a cottage really, within walking distance of the clinic that Alexandre has been admitted to. The Godats, the owners, say that it was the home that they began their own married life in, but it was too small after they had children. They plan to gift it to Bastien, their eldest, when he weds himself, but as he is merely eleven and that day is still far away, they rent it out to help the family finances. It is a charming little place with only four rooms
with only the bedroom being fully divided off, so I can see why they needed to move to have room for a growing family.

It is plenty large enough for myself and Alexandre and, even better, already furnished with plain, but adequate, basics from furniture to cooking vessels. The only non-perishable things we need to supply for ourselves are linens and pillows. We have already made arrangements to pay Bastien to bring wood for our fireplace and cook stove. He has also generously offered to keep the water barrel filled from the well for me.

Alexandre and I have been blessed to have encountered so many kind strangers during our lives that have stepped in when we were in need of assistance. Your dear Papa may not have mentioned it, but I can say without doubt that had he not given a hand to a road worn young man and woman, Alexandre and I would not be where we are today and might not even still be alive.

I must sign off now. Frau Godat has stuck her head in and said she knows of a woman who has a pair of goose down pillows that she would be willing to sell. Give my best regards to your Henri and my love to Uncle Lucien.

Votre cousine dévouée,

Millicente

From : Thun, Switzerland

April 3, 1918

Lawrence,

I have been married now for a full two months and Millicent has not yet kicked me to the curb, so we will likely go the distance. In France, they say the first month of marriage is smooth and sweet as honey. I suppose that the second month is when life intrudes in again.

Millicent continues to be a font of interesting tidbits. As you know, she reads a great deal in several different languages, so she picks up odd bits of knowledge here and there. Once she picks them up, she doesn’t put them back down. I suppose that memory of hers is one reason she is so good with picking up languages.

But I digress. What I had meant to mention was something she brought up over dinner about the suspected origins of the honeymoon tradition. From one treatise she read, it was suggested that the custom began back when men still stole their brides from their families. The so-called honeymoon was the period of time the man went in hiding with his new wife until her father and brothers gave up the hunt and/or accepted the fact that the marriage had been consummated.

Speaking of disapproving relatives, I discovered what my Aunt had done to Millicent and wrote her a very stern letter that I have yet to receive a response on. I am trying not to judge her further on the lack of reply as I must take into account that the mails are not assured safe and swift passage, but I must admit that I grow a bit more aggrieved with each passing day. I fear one thing the war has done for me is to shorten my temper, but I am working on that fault. Millicent certainly has no qualms about calling me out on it if I am being snappish.

It is amazing how isolated I feel here. I had not realized how much war news one receives as a matter of course while in a military hospital. News still comes here to the clinic I am assigned to, but infrequently and often days if not weeks after the events in question. Lady Anne, Millicent’s former guardian, is continuing to send the papers and that is keeping us abreast of events back in England. I
have enclosed a few clippings that Millicent and I thought would be of general interest to you.

Millicent has reminded me that it is nearly time for my appointment at the clinic, so I will wrap this up and post it on the walk to the clinic. Between the daily walks I take with Millicent, my treatment and the Swiss air, I feel far more like myself than I have since my time in the trenches. Keep well and we shall continue to keep you in our thoughts and prayers.

Alexander

From : London, England

April 10, 1918

My dearest nephew,

I must admit that I did not react well when I first received the letter from you. I threw it down and did not acknowledge it until Coira found it when she came by for tea. She read it, then questioned me about what you wrote about the religious tracts I had sent. I confessed everything to her including some details that you seem to be unaware of - and that is to the credit of your new wife's discretion.

When Coira learned how old Millicent was at the time, she grew quite angry as her own daughter eleven years old now and she asked how I would feel if, in four years, someone treated Carol the way I had treated Millicent. She also pointed out that Millicent was only a year older than Carol when she had lost her own mother and that I should have taken the opportunity to give the poor child a maternal figure in her life. Listening to what Coira had to say forced me to re-examine my actions.

I owe two apologies to you. First is for delaying the writing of this letter. Amelia tells me I allow my pride to get in my way far too often, especially as I always lectured the three of you on the pitfalls that pride can bring. Second is for failing to do as you requested and send the desired books to Switzerland.

As for Millicent, I owe her an even larger apology for substituting the tracts and Bible for the present you had intended as well as for the tone of my letter that accompanied them. I would not blame her if she refused to accept it.

Both Coira and Amelia agree that I should refrain from writing to Millicent herself as the apology I need to make must be done in person so that she may properly judge my sincerity. When the time comes that you bring your new bride home for the first time, I will apologize to her as she deserves and I hope that from that point, she and I might make a fresh beginning. If that proves to not be possible, I have already made arrangements to move in with Coira's family.

Your ashamed, but still devoted Aunt,

Avelina

From : Vaucluse, France

April 23, 1918

Ma très chères Millicente et Alexandre,

I have enclosed a news clipping for you to see. Baron Manfred von Richthofen - the one we called Le Diable Rouge - was killed in combat on Alexandre's birthday. Papa says that he is sure that the
loss of the Baron will demoralize the Germans, notamment among the other pilots. I pray he is right and that this will help shorten the war.

I am perturbé at how I can feel joie over the death of anyone, but I cannot help but feel it over the passing of one who has caused the death of so many others. Beyond the dreadful loss of life, I believe the thing I despise the most about war is the feelings that it brings out in me. There are, perhaps, things about myself that I would have preferred to have never known, vous voyez ce que je veux dire?

It may sound out of place in this letter, but my tardif wishes to Alexandre for a joyeux anniversaire.

Je t'embrasse de votre cousine,

Cerise

____________________

From : Thun, Switzerland

June 12, 1918

Ma très chère Cerise,

My sincerest apologies for such a gap between Alexandre and I have been quarantined by the orders of the doctors in charge of Alexandre's health. First he fell ill and then I did. We have fortunately come to the other side relatively unscathed, but I must admit that I still feel too weak to do much more than bask in the sunshine. Fortunately, that is one thing that the doctors have recommended - plenty of rest, fresh air, and sunshine.

I overheard the doctors talking about an influenza that is sweeping through Spain. I wonder if fear that we might have had that terrible illness might be why the doctors were taking such precautions with the two of us. It seems a shame that people have to worry with diseases when so much threat is already hanging over us all from the war.

I fear my stamina is at an end, so I will end this with my hopes that you and your family remain in good health. Please do give our love to Uncle Lucien.

Votre cousine dévouée,

Millicente

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