A Rose By Any Other Name

by LirielLee

Summary

More than anything, Mary Lennox fears becoming the same vain, selfish, empty-headed creature as her mother. To prevent this, she runs away from her school in London to join the war effort. As she learns painful lessons through the war, her thoughts linger on her two boys: Colin at school in London and Dickon called up to serve in the war himself, and her secret garden. Life can be cruel and harsh during war, but sometimes it can also give us exactly what we want most.

Notes

I've had this idea in my head for a while now. I have 7 chapters fully or partially written and the rest in my head so I know how it ends and how I'm going to get there, but it may take me some time. For now my Merlin story is still my priority when I have time to write, but I'll work this in when I can.

I own nothing because I am not as awesome as Frances Hodgson Burnett
Dear Uncle Archie and Colin,

I am sorry to have to do this to the two of you. You know I love you both very much, you are my only family and you gave me the only loving home I have ever known. I greatly regret that what I am about to do will hurt you both, but I must follow my own path.

I am going to join the war effort. I can no longer sit by and study deportment and art and pretend that there is not a greater world out there. The Glittering world of society that you keep pushing me to accept will never make me happy. I want to be of use to the world, not just be another pretty face in a new gown.

I will write to you when I can, but for obvious reasons I cannot give you an address to write to me. I am so sorry to grieve you, please try not to worry overly, I will be as safe as I can be. I feel this is something I must do, please try to understand. I love you both.

Mary Lennox

And so Mary Lennox left behind the London she despised and the moors she loved to serve in the war effort. As she had excelled at studying French in school she was able to convince the young secretary at the Red Cross office that she was a French orphan who had been sent to London before the war to study. She lied about her age and gave her name as Marie Girard. The Great War had been going on for more than two years by that time and those in the medical field were in great need. Mary was accepted into the Red Cross as a Nurses Aid without any questions about her background and was quickly sent out for the minimal training she would be given before being sent to a medical facility.
Another Day Done

Mary tried to roll the tension out of her shoulders as she finished another shift. She was tired and had seen things now that would haunt her forever, but she had never regretted her decision to run away and join the Red Cross nurses. Whenever she became overwhelmed by the suffering around her she would distract herself with memories. Sometimes she thought of her time in London, the tedious balls, the shallow gossip of the other girls, the arrogance of the upperclass boys living off of their names. Remembering her disgust with that life reaffirmed her decision to find a true purpose in her own life and not just become what her mother had been; a beautiful, refined creature too selfish with thoughts of balls and dresses to care about her only child.

Other times she simply remembered the secret garden and her happy times there with Dickon and Colin. When she was surrounded by the smells of blood and disinfectants it was difficult to recall the scent of the roses in bloom and the moist soil as she weeded. Although the scents were a vague memory now, she could still clearly see the garden in her mind. The ivy covered walls, the lilies and roses, the purple crocuses that signaled the arrival of spring, the old swing swaying in the breeze. Yes, she could envision it all, even the three children who had filled its walls with laughter. Oh, how she missed them.

Thoughts of her two boys always brought tears to her eyes, although she would never let them fall. She had made her decision and she would not regret it. Still, she wished there was a way to talk to them both, she longed to know how they were doing.

She and Colin had been at different schools in London, but they had always found time to get together and the two were more like brother and sister than cousins. Mary knew it had hurt Colin dreadfully when she had disappeared, still she knew he would understand her need to act and not just become another society girl. He had his schooling and his father to keep him in place. While Mary enjoyed reading and learning, she had never liked school and the restrictions that came with it. Proper education for a girl was so much more confining than the choices offered to the boys.

Colin loved school and would surely continue on to a university and someday inherit his father’s title and all that came with it. She knew he would use it all for the good of those around him, he would have the means to act in the manner he wished. Mary thought of her own inheritance in trust in a London bank and knew that she was able to do much more good out here on the lines than if she had stayed and did what proper young ladies were expected to do; namely marry a rich young man and maybe support a charity or two with the occasional fundraiser.

The sight of another soldier being carried in the doors as she walked out to go to her room made her think of her other boy, Dickon, sweet happy Dickon. She sighed. It was impossible to lie to herself that thoughts of Dickon had not influenced her decision to be here. She had been informed when he had been called up but had not been able to return to Misselthwaite in time to see him again. Her heart ached at the thought of Dickon lying in the trenches feeling so far away from the moon he loved. He would be brave and strong she knew, but she wondered if his sweet heart would survive this kind of constant attack. She loved him, she had loved him since she was ten, before she even knew what love was. When she had been sent away to school she had been sad to leave the garden and the moor, but she had known she would see them again, that they would still be there when she came back. She had been terrified of leaving Dickon because there was no guarantee that he would be. At thirteen she had just been starting to understand that the love she felt for Dickon was not like the love she felt for her uncle or her cousin. She had been vaguely aware that her leaving for school meant nothing would ever be the same between them. By the time she returned she would be seventeen and he would be nineteen, no longer carefree children. She would be expected to be a proper young lady and find a husband and he may have already found a country girl to love and raise a family with. She could never begrudge him this happiness if he had found it, but she knew her own heart would never move on. She had met no men in society to compare to him; his honesty, his compassion, his cheerfulness had been the ideal she would hold all other men to.

“How was the ward tonight?” her friend Becky asked as she entered their dorm room.

“Eet vas quiet”, she answered with a smile. Nine months into her time her Marie persona was so ingrained now that she didn’t even have to think about answering with the correct French accent, it just happened automatically. Still afraid that Colin or her uncle would be trying to find her and drag her home she had decided to just keep the name and accent that she had used to enlist. Sometimes she amused herself by imagining everyone’s reactions if she suddenly started speaking Yorkshire instead of French. Ah well, at least her forced time in school had given her the means to escape detection as Mary Lennox. Although she doubted that this was the type of trip to France her teacher had expected the lessons to be used for.

The thought made Mary smile as she slipped into her cold narrow bed. A few hours of sleep and then she would be back on the ward.
Dickon regained consciousness slowly, gradually becoming aware that the sounds around him were not the sounds of the trench that he had been used to for so long now. He could hear low voices and soft moans of pain, not the crash of mortar and the echo of screams that he last remembered. He felt fuzzy and lost, where was he exactly? Recognizing that he was close to panicking, he forced himself to take several deep breaths and keep still.

He tried to open his eyes to view his surroundings and found that he couldn't push them open, the world was completely dark. This revelation led to another round of mental panic, but again after a few minutes he was able to gain control of himself. If he couldn't use his eyes he would simply have to use his other senses.

Dickon took another deep breath and focused on the scents the breath brought to him. He could smell alcohol and antiseptic, blood and death. The two were familiar scents from the trenches, but he didn't smell the muddy earth and smoke from mortar and artillery.

He moved his fingers slightly and felt a coarse material under them and recognized that he was laying down on something semi soft, a blanket and bed maybe. Gaining confidence he continued to move his hands over his body, carefully noticing bandages and twinges of pain that hinted at multiple injuries. Finally he let his hands move up to his eyes and found them covered in thick gauze pads, he let out a relieved sigh. At least he knew why he couldn't see or open his eyes right now, he had sustained some kind of injury to his face and eyes. The fear that he might be truly blind was still with him, but there was hope now that it was only temporary.

Dickon let himself relax, so he was injured but had been treated and ... he must be in one of the makeshift hospitals that hovered near the front lines.

Footsteps approached and he heard a reassuringly clipped English tone address him.

“So Private, awake at last.”

“Yes, ma’am,” was his hesitant reply.

He listened intently as she gave him a run-down of his injuries while checking his bandages.

“The doctor’s aren’t positive yet how bad the damage is to your eyes, but everything else is healing fairly well. We will check your eyes in a few days and if you can see at that time then eventually you’ll be sent to the recovery ward.”

Dickon flinched at the casual way the nurse spoke of the uncertainty of his ever seeing again. As she walked away he lost himself in the memories of the beautiful sights of life that he might never see again.

A few days later his body was starting to feel better, his injuries were healing and he was more rested than he had been any time in recent memory. The doctor had chosen not to check his eyes yet, wanting them to have a few more days without any stress, but Dickon felt he was starting to adjust to only using his other sense to know what was going on around him.

He mostly ignored the talk of the other recuperating soldiers surrounding him, choosing to live in his memories and thoughts for now, they were a happier place than anything else around him. Still, it wasn’t always possible to block out the sounds of pain and death and his new bed neighbor was quite a loud complainer.

“Ain’t this ward quiet,” the boy began his next rant of the day.

“I wouldn’da know,” Dickon answered. “Tis the only one I’ve been in.”

“I just came to this one after I needed another surgery, before I was in the upper ward and boy did we have a good time there, this one seems too depressin to me. I know this is where we’re supposed to recover and all before we’re well enough to move up, but I gotta say it’s too dull here to push a man to get better.”

Dickon made a noncommittal sound, doubting it was very different between any of the wards, all full of soldiers injured in body, mind and soul and just waiting to be well enough to be sent back to the trenches or waiting to die.

“And the nurses on this ward,” the boy continued, “they can’t compare to the angel up there.”

“Ah, you’d be talking about Marie,” another soldier commented from across from Dickon.

Dickon cocked his head in curiosity, he hadn’t heard any mention of a Marie before, but then he had to admit that he barely noticed the nurses at all, too lost in his own thoughts and memories.

“You’ve seen her too then?”

“Aye, little French girl that was educated in London. She’s a beauty all right, I think almost every man that comes thru that ward has proposed marriage to her.”

Dickon drifted back out of the conversation, there was only one girl that he thought of anymore. Mary Lennox would be a beautiful young woman now he knew. He tried to imagine what she would look like, but the picture in his head was still the energetic 13 year old that he had last seen before she was sent to London for school. Golden hair gleamed in the summer sun as they worked together in the garden that last week before she left. He remembered the hot tears she had cried when she found out that she was to be sent away and her plea to Dickon that he would protect what she loved. He loved her with all the innocence of a young love and he had faithfully kept his promise to care for the garden until the day he had left to go to France.

He realized that she would be seventeen now and done with her education. Even now she might be back at Misslethwaite and would see that he had broken his promise, the garden had been left alone for over a year now and that broken promise was just another hurt now to add to his time in the trenches. She would not blame him of course, but still he felt he had let her down.
Another day passed filled with anxious thoughts and more prodding by the nurses and doctor. With a resigned sigh Dickon sat himself up in his bed and waited for the latest report from the nurse on how his healing was progressing. The doctor had checked his eyes and then replaced the gauze over them. He had looked under all of the bandages and had seen no sign of infection and so everything was cleaned and rewrapped and the doctor had given the nurse his notes before moving on the next patient.

“You’re recovery is progressing nicely Private,” the nurse informed him. “Your arm is setting properly and the gashes from the shrapnel are not infected and are almost fully healed. The Doctor thinks you should be able to start taking the bandage over your eyes off for a several hours a day in a few days to slowly let them readjust to the light. I would think that you will be moved to the upper ward by next week.”

He nodded to her and heard her move on to the next bed. He reveled at the thought of being able to take the bandages off finally and was more grateful than he knew how to express that his eyes were not permanently damaged. When he had first realized he couldn’t see after the explosion his thoughts had been on the sights he would never be able to see again, namely his beloved moors and the garden in summer. And, he admitted to himself, the sight of Mary. If he lived though this he had always expected that he would at least be able to see her again. He couldn’t know how she had changed over the years, maybe she wouldn’t want to see a poor moor boy anymore or maybe she would be on the arm of some rich lord, but at least he would be able to see the woman she had become.

He had no delusions that that would be happening any time soon. If the doctors thought he could be healed up in less than two months he would be treated and sent back out to the trenches. Only more serious injuries that warranted months or years of healing were enough to send a soldier home now that the war had been dragging on for over three years.

The sound of excited hellos called him back to the ward. He could hear a number of the injured men calling out to someone that must have just entered.

“Marie, I’ve missed you so.”

“Marie, over here, do you remember me?”

“Marie, how about a game of chess?”

“Marie, are they moving you up here or are you just visiting?”

“Marie, Bobby told me all about you and I’m thrilled to finally meet you.”

Dickon heard a beautiful voice with a French accent answer all of the calls as she moved around the room. “Ah, so this is the lovely Marie that I keep hearing of” Dickon thought with a chuckle. He was able to pinpoint where she was in the room by the excited voices that seemed to follow her. He leaned back in his bed already drifting back to his dreams when he heard one soldier tell her that he was thinking of coming up with new symptoms for the doctor so that he would never have to leave her.

The girl laughed in response, a pure sparkling sound that had Dickon jolting upright with a gasp. Before he could register a conscious thought he heard the doctor calling imperiously for the aide and her accented answer moving further away.

“It couldn’t be,” he moaned to himself. “She’s na here, she’s a proper English lady now, not some French nurses aide.” He continued to explain to himself that he hadn’t heard what he thought he had, that it was just a foolish reaction because of his daydreams. It was just that he wanted to hear the sound so badly that he made himself imagine it. Yes, that must be it; that was the only reasonable explanation because otherwise he would not have just heard Miss Mary’s laugh.

Chapter Notes

Just a short chapter this week, but don’t worry we’re getting closer to the action of the story. Also, I cannot write Yorkshire, so please forgive my weak attempt at it, I simply try my best.
I am so sorry to anyone reading this story, I did not mean to be away for so long. I had hoped I would have more time to write over the summer and instead I barely had time to breathe and my fall was even crazier. However, I have not abandoned this story, in fact I have the next several chapters partially written so the reveal and the action is coming.

On a story note, I cannot write a "French" accent and I will not subject you to my attempts, so in the story whenever MARIE responds to something instead of MARY just assume she is doing so in her French character instead of her English tone. Also, this chapter was supposed to raise the tension leading to the big meeting and now that I'm finished with it I worry it's boring instead. If it is I apologize and rest assured that the moment we've all been waiting for is in the next chapter and it is already mostly written. Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoy.

“Are you ready to go Marie?” Becky asked.

“Oh! Marie replied as she stuck a final pin into her simple twist to hold it in place for the shift ahead of her.

The two girls chattered casually as they walked over to the makeshift hospital. Mary had found a good friend in Becky and often wondered if she should tell the other girl the truth about who she was.

“The line hasn’t moved in weeks,” Becky said as she looked over the hills to where they both knew the front line was located several miles away.

“Oh, sink goodness. Everyday try attempt it we have so many more soldiers to tend.”

“I know,” Becky nodded. “And they run the risk of losing the line and being forced back again. It frightens me so when the line gets closer to us. Remember the sound of the explosions last time? I was terrified the hospital would be blown up around us as we worked.”

Mary didn’t respond, her eyes scanned the horizon as well and was grateful that things seemed calm for the moment. There was no denying that she was just as afraid of the fighting spilling into the hospital as everyone else, but she was determined to be brave and stand her ground if need be.

Her and Becky hurried into their ward and began their duties for the day. Mary spent the next hours assisting in cleaning out wounds, delivering food, and generally doing whatever she could to help the wounded soldiers heal in body and mind. She read them books, told stories, sang, helped them write letters, played chess or cards, soothed and encouraged in any way she could.

At the end of her shift she was holding an older soldiers’ hand as she hummed softly to help him fall asleep. Out of the comer of her eyes she saw a nurse lead a new patient onto the ward and put him around for one of the aids. Mary was just wondering if she should get up and help when she saw Amy from the next shift walk over and take the soldier and lead him to a bed. She went back to her soft humming until she was sure his breathing was smooth and relaxed. She stood quietly and tried to roll out the tightness in her neck as she looked around to catch Becky’s eyes, and motion to the clock. Becky noticed the time and nodded, they both began moving to the door, their shift done for the day.

Soldiers called good-bye as they left and Mary gave soft words of support to several as she passed them. She could see by the look in their eyes when she spent time with them that she was helping, was making the difference she had hoped she could some day, but it never seemed enough. These men, some of them really only boys, were being broken down by this war and what it was making of them. They were forced to kill, forced to watch fellow soldiers die around them and often was impatiently to see if this was the day they too would be killed. Viewing their strength, their determination to get well in order to go back to the lines to help friends that were still there, Mary felt humbled to play a part in their lives, however small it may be. She only wished she could do more.

“Oh, my arms ache,” Becky muttered to Mary as they stepped out the door into the dusky evening.

Mary nodded her agreement, while her current shift had her on the recovery ward for those soon to be released instead of the surgery or the critical ward, there was still plenty of wounds to tend to and cleaning to be done along with helping the soldiers in all manners of ways. With a mental chuckle she tried to imagine the spoiled frail little girl she had been before Misselthwaite and the garden doing the work she did now. Or even better, one of the pretty insipid society creatures she had gone to school with, that image was so funny she nearly laughed out loud. No matter how her body ached with the work she was doing, she reminded herself to relish the pain because it was proof that she was doing something worthwhile with her life.

“I was just imagining the delicate society girls of London trying a shift at the hospital,” Marie answered, giggling at the thought again.

Becky joined in with the laughter, “Aye, that would be a sight for sure. We’d be kept busy catching the poor frail creatures as they fainted at every sight of blood and not a thing would get done.”

“It would do some of them some good, I think, to see what happens in the world outside of their drawing rooms.” Marie replied, thinking of the many girls she had known who had no thought for anyone else’s suffering or hardships.

“You simply can’t expect much from ladies like that,” Becky shrugged. “They weren’t raised to think for anyone else’s suffering or hardships.

As Becky’s startled look, Mary realized she may have allowed too much of her dislike of the “pretty little birds” to come through. Cursing her emotional outburst, Mary cast about her mind for something else to say.

“I don’t think that the news they read of the front, if they read about it at all, is any way accurate to the hardship. The food rationing that is so devastating to the poor is unlikely to affect the wealthy and likely their bitterest complaint is of the lack of dancing partners at their balls as so many of the young men are gone now.” Though she had started calmly, Marie’s voice had risen during her rant and she ended wishing she could do more.

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“She and Amy from the next shift have their heads as to what it takes us free birds to survive in the world.”

“You’re quite right, I suppose. They have their charity balls and raise funds for the war effort but I wonder how much they really think about the war and those fighting in it. Even with the war going on for two years now, I very much doubt most of them have had to deal with any real hardship. The food rationing that is so devastating to the poor is unlikely to affect the wealthy and I do not think that the news they read of the front, if they read about it at all, is any way accurate to make them cognizant of the true horrors that the soldiers are experiencing. Likely their bitterest complaint is of the lack of dancing partners at their balls as so many of the young men are gone now.” Though she had started calmly, Marie’s voice had risen during her rant and she ended sounding a great deal like the tempestuous Mary of her childhood.

Mary glanced at Becky, impressed by both the thought and that Becky could see beyond the glittery life of ease that was all most working class girls saw when they glimpsed a pretty young debutante in her fine gown and jewels.

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a way to deflect the curiosity she could see brewing in Becky’s eyes. She supposed that she could simply tell her friend the truth and hope Becky would keep her secret. It would be far simpler than making up a back story to tell Becky and hope it didn’t contradict anything she may have said previously… and really, it might be nice to have someone to confide in finally and be herself with.

Before she could make a decision or Becky could ask any questions, the pair were interrupted by an older, weary looking woman. “Ah, Marie, there you are. I tried to catch you while you were still on shift, but I was told I had just missed you.”

“Yes, we were just heading back to the dormitory. Is there something you needed Mrs. Milner?” Marie questioned the head nurse.

“I was hoping you would be amenable to moving your shifts to the surgery for the next few days. We have had a number of wounded pouring in lately due to the latest troop offensive and the poor girls there are quite overwhelmed. I heard that you had done a commendable job the last time you were there and I need a good steady girl to help them out.”

“Of course, Mrs. Milner,” Marie answered, pleased to have been noticed for her hard work. “I can report there first thing in the morning.”

“Thank you Marie… both of you,” the older woman turned tired but warm smiles on both girls. “I often feel as though having young ladies such as yourselves serving on the front lines is something nearly unforgivable of those of us in charge, but your help is sorely needed and never doubt that your work is greatly appreciated. We could not save nearly as many of our countrymen as we do without your sacrifice.” She gave them each another proud look and a gentle smile before she turned to head back to the hospital.

Becky and Mary watched the older woman leave before giving each other bashful grins at the praise they had received. Their previous discussion was forgotten in the glow of being given sincere compliments from a woman they both admired and respected.

“Well, I guess I better get a good night’s sleep to be ready for surgery tomorrow,” Marie commented as she turned back towards the make-shift dormitory.

“We’ll both need a restful night, you may have to be in the surgery, but I will have to break all those men’s hearts when they learn their precious Marie won’t be there to see them tomorrow,” Becky teased as they resumed their walk. “It’s really quite damaging to my self-esteem I’ll have you know, to see the disappointment in a soldier’s eyes when he sees me come to take care of him instead of you,” and she pouted dramatically at her friend.

Mary laughed with her and linked arms as they approached their building. She really had found a good friend in Becky.

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“Hello Bridget, what do we have here?” Dickon heard a soft voice ask from several steps in front of him. He did his best not to let his body tense at the unexpected sound, there were too many other noises around for him to have heard the light footsteps approaching and he truly disliked not being able to see what was coming his way.

The nurse who had been guiding him, squeezed his arm reassuringly as she answered the new voice. “This is Private Sowerby and he’ll be joining your ward today to have the bandages around his eyes taken off so he can finish his recuperation. Private this is Amy and she’ll remove your bandages and get you settled in.” She squeezed his arm again before passing his hand to Amy and then because he was listening for it, he could hear her footsteps walking away as she left.

“Well then Private, I’ve got an empty bed over here in the corner where it won’t be too bright for your eyes as they readjust to the light,” the new voice, Amy he supposed, said calmly as she gently led him across the ward.

Dickon blinked owlishly at a round-faced brunette as his eyes were uncovered and then he followed her instructions as she checked his injuries. After confirming that his eyes were tracking movement and that the light wasn’t causing any pain she left him to rest as he observed the new ward. As it was evening, most of the beds were filled with soldiers settling in for the night. The soldiers in this ward were nearly ready to head back to duty and so they were much more mobile and active than his previous room. There were small groups of men chatting or playing card games and the nurses and aides passed among them handing out medications or fresh bandages and generally doing their best to lift the men’s spirits.

Dickon sighed as he settled in against his pillow, he knew he would only need a few more days to recover enough to be sent back to the trenches. If only this blasted war would end. He could no longer see a future for himself outside of the blood and mud and sounds of death that haunted his dreams. Misselthwaite and his golden Mary seemed like a life that had belonged to someone else and he was starting to doubt that he would ever see either one again.
Hello to my wonderful readers. This is not another chapter, sorry to disappoint. For anyone interested I wanted to give a brief history of when this story is set as I did actually plan it with what was going on historically at the time, if that doesn’t interest you then by all means skip this and carry on when the next chapter comes up.

Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote “The Secret Garden” in 1910, although it was published in 1911. In the book Mary and Colin are 10 and Dickon is 12. For my story it is now 1916 and Mary and Colin are 16 and Dickon is 18, he would have been recruited for the war effort as soon as he was of age.

Great Britain declared war in August of 1914 and most thought the war would be over by Thanksgiving. Many months and thousands of deaths later it became very clear that the new modern warfare would be anything but short. By 1916, when I have set my story, the war has been going on for 2 years and the military is desperate for new recruits, taking boys as soon as they were of age and sending them with little or no training to the fronts.

In the previous chapter Mary mentions food rationing. The government began the rationing of food supplies as soon as the war started, however there really wasn’t a shortage of anything until 1916 when the unrestricted warfare of the German U-boats began causing true problems. The wealthy were able to purchase what they wanted on the black market, but the poor were quickly becoming undernourished. The government was able to add many essentials to the list of foods being rationed and true starvation for the masses was avoided although there were still many problems. In order to assist with the food shortages, around 3 million acres of green area was claimed by the government to be turned into farmland. This means that any garden space could be ordered to grow crops instead (hint for what may be happening at Misselthwaite) and as the men were gone it was primarily women who worked the land.

Mary joins the Voluntary Aid Detachment, a real group of mostly women who provided field nursing services. At the start of the war many of the VADs were women of the upper and middle classes and the military would not allow them on the front lines. Eventually the desperate need for more aid meant that regulations were changed to allow women over the age of 23 and with a minimum of 3 months experience to serve overseas. These volunteers worked in the field hospitals, drove ambulances, cooked and offered any aid they could. There was a great deal of tension between the VAD and military nursing groups at the beginning of the war as the VADs often had little real training and many were critical of the military doctors and nurses. Eventually the VAD was worked into the command structures and their aides were given more training, leading to a better working relationship with military personnel and better care given to the wounded. Many of the women of the VAD served with distinction and several famous VAD nurses were Agatha Christie, Amelia Earhart, and Enid Bagnold (author of National Velvet).

I have placed the hospital Mary and Dickon are at in the middle of the Somme Offensive, near the river Somme in France. The Battle of the Somme was fought between July 1 and November 18th of 1916 in a constantly shifting trench war between French and English allies against the Germans. More than 1 million men were wounded or killed during the 5 month offensive, making it one of the bloodiest battles in human history. Although the combined British and French troops were able to move the front 6 miles into German territory, the action was criticized by the Churchill and others for failing to achieve the actual goals that had been set and for the high rate of casualties.

Well that’s what I’ve got for now. I didn’t want to bore everyone with too much detail, but I at least wanted to give you some contextual background that was important to me as I wrote the story. Thanks for sticking with me thru this story and the reveal and action are coming up next.
A few days later, Dickon saw the sunrise one morning for the first time in three weeks. He had stood in the narrow window of the makeshift ward and watched in rapt attention as the sky lit up and the sunlight crept over the muddy ground. It wasn’t his beloved moor but he still felt the need to just be outside again. He had talked to the aid on shift and she said that the soldiers in this ward were not on restriction currently so if they wanted to step outside to the small green area they were allowed. Dickon had quickly slipped out and had now spent most of the day sitting in the grass and just breathing in the air and the sunlight. His thoughts, as usual, strayed to the secret garden and to Colin and especially to Mary. Time flew as his mind wandered to happier times and it was hours before he looked around him to see that several other wounded soldiers had come outside to relax for a brief moment. Off to the side he could see a blonde head walking over to one of the soldiers and heard someone else call out “Hello Marie.”

“Ah, her again,” he thought. He had not really seen her since coming in to the ward two days ago. She had peeked her head in one morning to let the others know she wouldn’t be in with them for a few days and from across the room his still healing eyes could only make out a blonde head. He had heard some men complaining that she had needed to assist in the surgery for a couple of days and so they had had to do without their favorite angel. He wasn’t sure if he wanted to meet her or not, he had a feeling it might be painful. With her golden hair and that laugh that reminded him so much of Mary he thought it might just make him more homesick to be around her. She would be a reminder of the woman he loved but could never be with. He saw her making her rounds to all the soldiers standing outside and could hear her laughing accent ringing across the small area as she asked them questions and chatted with them. He decided that he just couldn’t bear to be around this teasing glimpse of what he truly wanted and so turned to head inside.

Before he could reach the door he was stopped by a man named Michael that he had talked with the day before. The two had spent time talking about their homes and Michael had been interested in hearing about the moors and how peaceful it could be.

“Ah, Dickon,” he said limping over, “I’ve been thinking about what you told me yesterday. I really think I might like to see it when this blasted war is over.”

“This is the best place in the world,” Dickon answered with a smile, noticing out of the corner of his eye that Marie was heading over to them as she walked to the door to go back inside.

“Aye, it sounds like it, so much cleaner and calmer than London. I think I’ll need that if I ever get out of here,” Michael paused as he grinned at the girl who had obviously walked up behind Dickon. “That is if the charming Marie will ever let me leave.” Michael winked at Dickon, “She keeps changing my paperwork around so that the docs think I’m worse than I really am just so she can keep me around longer.”

Dickon heard Marie laugh that laugh that both soothed and pained his soul and he resolved not to turn around and see a face that wouldn’t be Mary’s. Michael stepped past him to give the aid a smug grin and Dickon took a step closer to the door, wanting only to get away.

“What was that sound again,” Michael stopped him with a question. “That sound you said the wind made over the moors?”

Dickon glanced behind him to answer Michael’s question when he heard a soft voice say, “Wuthering.”

“What?” Michael’s gaze snapped to the girl standing between him and Dickon

“Over the moors, the wind wuthers.” She answered, sounding as if she wasn’t even aware that she was speaking out loud.

“Right, that was it,” Michael grinned and turned and walked away.

Dickon was frozen to the spot, trying to think through her answer. “What would this French girl who lived in London know about the moors? And why had she not sounded French when she had answered?”

The girl in question gave her head a jerky shake as if she was trying to wake from a dream and then turned and walked into Dickon whom she hadn’t realized was standing behind her.

His hands reached out and caught her arms as she stumbled and she glanced up with an embarrassed smile. Time froze.

He looked at her for the first time and saw beautiful features clearly set in the lines of the gentle, soft pink lips and sunny hazel eyes that spoke of an inner fire and will. His hands clenched on her upper arms as if trying to make sure she didn’t simply disappear.

Her embarrassed smile slipped from her lips as she saw a handsome face with sky blue eyes, soft dusty hair that had been cut too short to show its curl, and a wonderful wide mouth that looked like it used to smile a lot. Even though he was thin and pale it was obvious that he had grown into his features and she could imagine many women, country and proper, would blush with pleasure at a glance from him. Even with all the changes, she knew him instantly. Her breath came in soft shallow gasps and she felt as if her knees were going to collapse.

“Dickon,” she breathed in shock.

His hands clenched again when she said his name and he couldn’t think of anything coherent, all he managed to get out was her name, “Mary.”

“Oh Dickon,” she cried and she broke free of his grip only to throw her arms around him. “Oh, you’re alive, I’ve been so afraid, I’ve been out of contact with everyone for so long I was afraid I would miss any news of you.” She broke off and hugged him tighter, “I’ve had such nightmares about you… I just can’t believe… I was so afraid that…” She couldn’t seem to finish any one of those thoughts fully but the desperation in her arms and her voice said it all.

Dickon himself was beyond words, he could only stand there and cling to the wonderful presence in his arms, certain that it was a hallucination that would disappear if he so much as blinked.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the shorter chapter, but I felt the reveal scene needed it’s own moment, without being overshadowed by the conversation and events that start happening next. Hope you enjoy.
he was back in the trenches. His blood pounded in his ears and he felt the too familiar sensation of
Even though the sounds of battle were still fairly quiet and distant, to Dickon it felt as though
but I am glad to help in any way I can."
"I will not go home Dickon. I have a job to do here and I am going to do it. I know it's dangerous,
well and her lips thinned in annoyance before she took a deep breath in an attempt to calm herself.
The flash of fire in those eyes warned him that her own not inconsiderable temper was rising as
resolutely squared his shoulders, "You need to go home Mary, now."
"What on earth are…." she began indignantly.
once they were safely around the corner and out of sight of the other soldiers she yanked her arm
He regarded the small yard they were in and then grabbed her arm to lead her around the corner to
very real danger to offer her comfort. The lull in their conversation allowed him to finally glance
Dickon's hands reached out automatically to take Mary back in his arms in her distress, but
Dickon grinned in sudden understanding, "Mary, please tell me that you got Master Craven's
Dickon groaned in sudden understanding, "Mary, please tell me that you got Master Craven's
And you had a French accent. Why does everyone here think you are French?"
"I couldn’t very well give them my real name could I? It would have made it far too easy for
Dickon questioned in confusion, finally seeming to notice his inability to say anything
The worry in her voice and the feel of her pulling further away to get a better look at him
"Dickon?” Mary exclaimed in surprise at his aggressive hold and the fierce look on his face.
Dickon could only stand there dumbly, holding the weeping girl against his chest, still too
"Oh Dickon,” Mary exclaimed pulling away from him slightly so that she could look him over,
"You are alright aren’t you? You’ve been injured? But you’re recovering. How badly hurt are you?” she rambled without pause.
"Mary,” Dickon gasped again, desperately trying to make some sense of this sudden turn of
"Dickon?” Mary questioned in confusion, finally seeming to notice his inability to say anything
The sorry in her voice and the feel of her pulling further away to get a better look at him
He regarded the small yard they were in and then grabbed her arm to lead her around the corner to
the poor girl to be wounded in such a way. "You need to get the medical staff to take a look at you at
She was so much lighter on her feet, so much more graceful in her movements. Dickon’s mouth fell
Dickon exclaimed passionately, begging him with her eyes to understand her choice. "I want to help
"Getting letters to the front is difficult, it can take months and many never make it at all," he
answered, but her evasive answer was starting to make him suspicious. "Mary, how are you here?" he asked again.
"The expression that crossed her face was somehow both sheepish and defiant at the same time.
"Well, I may have joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment," she finally responded. "And it turns out
I have a rather strong stomach and enough ‘foolish courage’ as one of the head nurses put it to
Dickon wrote to me about sounded much more interesting than my lessons. Although...” and here her
Dickon exclaimed passionately, begging him with her eyes to understand her choice. "I want to help
Dickon, and Uncle Archie to find me and drag me back to London wouldn’t it," she replied with a toss
of her hair although she suddenly wouldn’t have his eyes.
While she was still holding onto my arm, Dickon felt a quick flutter in his chest. His heart sped up
"But you’re supposed to be at school... in London..." he stammered.
Dickon exclaimed in surprise at his aggressive hold and the fierce look on his face.
Mary exclaimed passionately, begging him with her eyes to understand her choice. "I want to help
Mary exclaimed in surprise at his aggressive hold and the fierce look on his face.
Dickon could only stand there dumbly, holding the weeping girl against his chest, still too
"Well, I finished," she stated. "And ahead of schedule too, it was really rather dull stuff in all honesty,"
"I mean how many times do we need to practice sitting perfectly and pouring tea gracefully? The history lessons were interesting, but they never went very in depth
Dickon exclaimed in surprise at his aggressive hold and the fierce look on his face.
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recommend me to the front line hospitals," she finished with a hopeful smile at him.
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helplessness and hopelessness settle in his veins. He had to protect her... he had to make her see sense.

“Mary, you need to go home,” he told her firmly, trying to keep the rising panic at bay. “You can’t be here.”

Mary blinked up at Dickon, her own Dickon... she thought she might never see him again, but here he was, right in front of her... telling her she needed to leave. She took in his tired eyes and the new frown lines on his face and knew that she couldn’t leave him now, she needed to do everything she could to take care of him.

“No, Dickon,” she tried to stay calm as she refused his demand. “I won’t leave, especially now that I know you’re here. I can help here and I will be able to take care of you if I stay.”

“Mary, you cannot stay here,” Dickon exclaimed, he could feel his fraying nerves start to snap as he contemplated all the ways she was vulnerable here on the front. He needed her to be safe, had never realized before how much the idea that she was safe and protected at home had given him comfort. He would do whatever it took to keep her safe.

“Mary, you will go home,” he said more forcefully than he had ever spoken to her before. “Even if I have to reveal your deceit to your superiors to make it happen.”

Mary's mouth dropped open in shock as she stared at Dickon incredulously. He was so stern, so far from his usual calm that she hardly recognized him. Mary didn’t think she’d ever seen Dickon so angry, the closest situation she could think of was when her, Dickon, and Colin had come across some boys from town tormenting a rather mangy looking dog as it tried to flee into the fields. The righteous anger Dickon had leveled at the boys had frightened them enough that they would likely never do it again. Feeling the same anger leveled at her, Mary had to admit that Dickon could be quite intimidating when upset, but it was simply not a part of her character to back down in the face of pressure.

“I will not leave!” she stated imperiously. “You do not control me Dickon. I have a job to do and I intend to do it.”

Mary’s obstinate anger collided with the sounds of battle in Dickon’s mind and he couldn’t clear his head enough to formulate a rational argument, all he could do was glare at her in frustrated rage and hold himself back from forcefully dragging her inside and demand her superiors send her home immediately.

"Is there a problem here?" a sharp voice interrupted them.

Both Dickon and Mary snapped their heads around to view the newcomer and saw that it was Michael, who had inadvertently brought about their reunion by asking about the moors. He was standing by the corner of the building, obviously unsure of his presence in their personal discussion, but worried enough about the angry tones he was hearing to want to be near if he needed to interfere.

Dickon, practically shaking in frustration and confused by the rage he was feeling, floundered in response and had to stop himself from snapping at the well-meaning man in fury. Mary seemed to collect herself more quickly. She stepped away from Dickon and took a deep breath to calm herself.

"Non," she replied, gathering her Marie personal around her out of habit, uncertain as to how much Michael may have overheard. "Just a small disagreement between friends." Marie insisted to Michael, who had inadvertently brought about their reunion by asking about the moors. He was standing by the corner of the building, obviously unsure of his presence in their personal discussion, but worried enough about the angry tones he was hearing to want to be near if he needed to interfere.

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Chapter End Notes

To anyone upset that Dickon seems rather ooc I just want to put a quick note that PTSD is a real bitch and he has been in a horrible situation for a while now with friends dying around him and he is definitely suffering from trauma and stress and not acting like himself.
Despite her best efforts, Mary was unable to focus on her work the rest of the day. Her thoughts constantly circled back to the unbelievable fact that she had actually found Dickon and then on to the disaster of their reunion. She understood that he was afraid for her, but how could he not understand that she was afraid for him too and that she didn’t want to leave him now that they were finally near each other again. Finally, around noon Mrs. Milner had called Marie into her office to check that she was feeling all right, as she had noticed Marie seemed distracted and short-tempered most of the morning. Unable to explain the true reason for her emotional state, Marie finally settled for telling Mrs. Milner that she was not feeling well and had gotten an unsettling letter from home. She felt badly for the men she was caring for when Mrs. Milner sent her back to the nursing dormitories in order to rest up, but she knew she needed to finish her confrontation with Dickon before she could focus on her work. However, when she went looking for him in the recovery ward, she was told that he had disappeared outside the minute he had finished eating and was likely wandering around the base as he seemed upset before lunch.

Feeling anxious and frustrated, Mary walked back to the dorms and seeing that her dorm room was currently empty she let herself truly feel all the anguish she had been trying to repress all morning. Her tears were as much from tension as from her fear for Dickon, but she needed a release and once they started she was not able to stop them. Finally, she had cried herself into an exhausted sleep, tired enough to sleep through the return of many of the other girls to the dorm in the evening and the ever-present sounds of battle. Most of the other nurses were worn out as well and they all were quiet as they settled down to attempt to sleep, but the not-so-distant sounds of gunfire and artillery made many of them too frightened to relax. As the evening wore on the sound of explosions drew closer and more of the young women were drawn from their beds to the narrow windows to watch the bursts of light in the darkness. The nurses’ aides were mostly younger working girls and the current group had not been on the front for very long. They were nervous and anxiously whispered among themselves about whether they should be concerned as to how close the battle-sounded.

Mary, however, had been on the front line of the medical building for months and even in sleep she recognized that something was wrong. As a particularly loud round hit in the darkened forest, she snapped awake and nudged in the window. She watched the proximity of the lights for only a moment before turning back to the roomful of frightened girls. Their faces were full of terror and indecision, and Mary knew that although they were all older than her, not one of them seemed ready to take charge. She closed her eyes and quickly prayed for strength before making her decision.

“That everyone got dressed quickly!” she ordered. “Once dressed, head over to the hospital immediately. Either we will be expecting casualties or an order for evacuation.”

As one, the women moved to follow her instructions. In their time with Marie they had all come to see her as friendly, practical, and dependable, but at that moment there was something more. In her voice was the commanding tone of one used to being obeyed.

In a matter of minutes all of the aids were dressed and on their way out the door of the building. Even in that short time the battle from the lines had moved closer to them. Gunfire, mortar rounds, and screams could be heard only a short way outside of the camp. The women ran quickly toward the hospital, unsure of what was happening so near to their sanctuary. The group was only a building away from the make-shift hospital when there was a horrible explosion from behind them. Screams and smoke filled the camp in awful intensity. Mary turned around to see that the old house that the nurses and aids had been using as a dorm was ripped in half and burning. All around Mary, Mary could see girls starting to cry and panic, but she was too focused to break down like many of the others. Her only thought was to get to the hospital… to get to Dickon.

She turned back and took off running again. Another few feet and Mary could see that the hospital was only a few dozen yards away when suddenly it was torn apart by a violent explosion.

Mary instinctively ducked as debris went flying past her and up in the air. After a moment she looked around and assessed the scene in front of her. A mortar round had hit the hospital at the opposite side of the building from where she was and so she was far enough away to not have been hit or hurt, but others would not have been so lucky. Blind panic surged through Mary as she realized that the hospital was burning.

“Dickon!” Mary gasped. She jumped up and raced toward the burning building only to be jerked to a stop moment later. She whipped her head around and saw that Becky, who she had not even realized had been following her, holding onto her arm in a desperate grip. “Let go,” she demanded of her friend as she tried to pull her arm free.

“No, Marie… it’s too dangerous.” Becky gasped trying to hold on to her panicked colleague.

“No!” Mary continued to struggle and screamed out the only thing that mattered to her right then… “Dickon!”

Dickon had walked for hours that day in an attempt to calm himself down. He didn’t taste the food he had for lunch, couldn’t even remember if he had eaten anything at all. He tried asking another of the aids if Marie was around that afternoon, only to be told that Marie hadn’t been feeling well and so had returned to the women’s dormitories to rest. He returned to his own ward and laid down on his cot, wanting only to ignore everyone around him until he could figure out what to say to Mary to make her go home to safety. His argument with Marie had continued to torment him… he hadn’t meant to get so angry, it wasn’t like him at all. Well, it hadn’t been like him before this damn war. He could admit to himself that thoughts of Mary had helped him stay strong through everything so far. He would think of their time together in the garden, would imagine going back there some day and seeing her again. Even while he was living in hell it helped to picture his golden Mary safe and happy at Misselthwaite. Of course, he now understood that it had all been an illusion, she was here in this hell as well. She could be hurt or even killed and she was certainly experiencing things that would change her forever and probably give her nightmares for years. He was furious.
with her for putting herself in danger. The thought of her in danger terrified him above all else. If anything happened to her he felt as if the sun would forever leave his life.

As he continued to think about the day, Dickon realized that fear for her and anger over her recklessness weren’t the only reasons he had lost it.

Jealousy.

There, he had admitted it, for the first time he could ever recall he felt jealousy. He had long assumed Mary would marry some wealthy lord and that did not make him jealous. He was envious of whoever she would eventually choose, but he was sadly resigned to the thought. He had not realized his own feelings for her until she was leaving for London and he had never seen any indication that she had romantic feelings for him, not that such a thing would have even occurred to him when they were young. Even had the emotions been present, acknowledged and returned, he knew there was no possible way for them to be together. Mary was a lady, and Dickon was nothing but a poor, uneducated village boy; there was no future for them. Still, no matter who she would marry he knew they would always have the memories of their youth in the garden and that she would always be his golden angel.

Yet and during their fight when she had tried to explain how she was helping the soldiers he could only remember the other men talking about Marie and what an angel she was. She was supposed to be his angel, but now the others were thinking of her that way as well. They were here with her, sharing experiences and jokes and probably falling in love with her just like Dickon had. Before he had been the only one to see this side of her: the willful, loving, and happy girl that existed when she was in the garden. Dickon remembered Mary complaining about the lady she had to be in society, elegant, demure, and proper. Knowing that he knew the real Mary was something that Dickon had always held on to after she had left for school. He had a feeling that the rich husband of his imagination would probably never know her as herself, as he did, and that had been a solace for him when he thought of losing her to some nameless lord.

Yet now, these soldiers knew the gentle, caring, true side of her as well. Perhaps they only knew her as the half-French Marie, but still they knew the real Mary that only Dickon and Colin had known before.

Dickon dropped his head into his hands when he realized his frustration and jealousy had made him react so angrily to Mary. She had been so happy to see him, had thrown her arms around him and cried. But he had argued with her and had let his own emotional scaring from his time out here overwhelm him and allowed it to make him hurt the woman he loved. God, he didn’t even feel like himself anymore.

“Oi, Sowerby,” a friend of Dickon’s named Thomas Reed called to him, shaking him from his trance and self-recrimination. “This isn’t looking good,” and Thomas pointed out the small window to the nearby forest.

Dickon slowly got up from his bed, noticing that the artillery sounds were much closer than the last time he had paid attention. After months on the front he was so used to the near constant sound of mortar and gunfire that they had nearly become background noise to him. But now, as he went to the window, he really focused on the sounds. Yes, they were definitely closer. A quick look out the window confirmed that the camp was about to be in danger.

“All right lads, I think it’s time we get movin,” Dickon didn’t think of himself as a leader, but he did trust his common sense enough to know that if the front lines were breaking down and the fight was getting closer then it was time to get out of a building that would certainly be a target.

“His eight boys,” Thomas nodded, “Let’s get movin.”

“Wait.”

Dickon looked over at a scared looking petite nurse’s aid. “You can’t just walk out. I mean, wouldn’t there be an evacuation order if we were really in danger?”

Mickey O’Donnell, an Irish lad Dickon had met in the trenches chuckled softly. “Waiting for those in charge to make a decision often costs people their lives darling.”

“Everyone who can walk, grab someone who can’t” Dickon called out as he helped an older soldier near him to get up and start moving. He was anxious to get to Mary, but he instinctively knew they all had to get out of the building.

“Round up the other girls and get them out,” Thomas ordered the aid and after a short pause she ran off to obey.

As fast as they could, the mobile wounded gathered those that needed help and started to move them down the halls. They saw several nervous nurses as they went, but no one stopped them. Dickon was only a few feet from the outside door when he finally heard several doctors ordering the nurses to start evacuating the wounded. Behind him he heard Mickey chuckle, “Took ‘em long enough to figure it out.”

Dickon could only nod in response, his thoughts were racing with plans to find Mary. Would the off duty aids have gotten an order to evacuate or were they still sleeping in their dormitory?

The group cleared the hospital and had gathered by a small out building to discuss what their next move should be. Dickon gently set down the soldier he had been helping and then took off towards the women’s housing area. He had to find Mary before the situation became absolute chaos.

“Aye, Sowerby, where do ya think you’re goin?”

Dickon looked behind him to see Thomas and Mickey following him. “There’s someone I need to find,” he answered as he kept moving. Before either of them could reply, an artillery shell hit the hospital and all three men hit the ground. When he looked back up, Dickon could see that almost half of the building was now burning wreckage. He knew that there was no way everyone had been evacuated before the blast. Heart racing, he took off running again only to make it around the corner and see the staff housing buildings already gutted and burning.

He froze in shock.

He couldn’t breathe, couldn’t think.

He didn’t know whether he wanted to collapse to his knees and cry or run into the fire in a desperate attempt to find Mary.

Before he could do either he heard an anguished cry off to his side.

“No! Dickon!”

He swiftly scanned the area and spotted a familiar blonde head on the fringes of the crowd staring at the burning hospital. She appeared to be struggling with another girl and Dickon took off in a sprint towards them.

“No, let go,” Mary continued to scream at Becky as she fought to break the other girl’s grip. “I have to find him!” She wrenched her arm down and felt Becky’s hand slip for a moment, which
was all she needed to twist herself completely loose and turn to run to the hospital again. She hadn’t gotten more than two steps before she felt another hand grab her upper arm and jerk her to a stop. Mary had only a moment to register how much stronger this grip was before she heard a voice call to her.

“Mary, I’m here.”

She whipped her head around and saw that it was indeed Dickon holding her arm. She gasped and for the second time in a day she threw herself into his arms. “This is becoming quite a habit,” she thought to herself a bit hysterically.

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