

# **IS THERE HONEY STILL?**

A World War One Play

**by Claire Jones**

**SchoolPlay Productions Ltd**

AN ENGLISH HEAVEN  
and  
IS THERE HONEY STILL?

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## CAST

**Eve**

**Elizabeth**                    *The Newcomer*

**Grace**

**Marie**                         *A French aide*

**Vinnie**                        *Lady Lavinia Montague*

**Thea:**                         *Dorothy Smythe*

**Ruth**

**Clare**                         *A War-Widow*

**Sister Frances Lawrence Q.A.I.M.N.S.**  
*In charge of the Unit.*

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

### **The Characters:**

#### **ELIZABETH KENYON:**

*A newcomer, to France, suffering badly from travel-sickness. Neat, a little prim, and very professional.*

#### **GRACE JENNINGS:**

*The night VAD. Has been nursing since the beginning of the war. She comes from a respectable background, but a rebellious streak led her into the suffragette movement and she served time in prison. This, combined with her war experience have made her very thick-skinned. She resorts to short-time affairs, as a form of comfort. Though good-hearted, there is something damaged about her.*

#### **EVE HALL:**

*Seriously ill, with a septic hand. Eve is also a long-time VAD but her extreme pain has served to regress her into childhood.*

#### **MARIE:**

*A French peasant-girl, whose family look after the VADs. Untidy, a little sluttish, but good-hearted.*

#### **LAVINIA (VINNIE) MONTAGUE:**

*Daughter of an aristocrat, Vinnie began by regarding nursing as a delicate occupation for a wartime lady, but when her eyes were opened, she often found it hard to adjust. Members of her family have been killed and she has had little time to grieve. The result is a restless, fidgety, sometimes spiteful person.*

#### **DOROTHY (THEA) SMYTHE:**

*Vinnie's friend. Also from the upper classes, though not as exalted as Vinnie. Thea is less abrasive than Vinnie, and often a peace-maker, but she lost her fianc e - Vinnie's brother - on the first day of the Somme offence and it is beginning to send her off the rails.*

#### **RUTH GOLDBERG:**

*Ruth is a loner, rather shy, though very clever and compassionate. She is Jewish, which causes some prejudice with the others. [This was far more of a problem at the beginning of the century]. Ruth says little; she has a strong sense of right and wrong.*

**CLARE LAWRENCE:**

*A young war-widow. Clare nursed in France at the beginning of the war, and married Walter Lawrence, originally a college teacher, at the end of 1915. He joined up, feeling he must 'do his bit' in time for the beginning of the Somme campaign, and was killed shortly afterwards. Clare is calm and capable, but you get the impression that something has gone from within her.*

**FRANCES LAWRENCE Q.A.I.A.N.S.(SISTER):**

*A professional Army Sister, in charge of the VADs, and an inflexible disciplinarian, realising that it is necessary to control emotions when there is hard work to be done. She is Clare's sister-in-law, though this will not be immediately acknowledged. She is, however, capable of some sympathy and humour.*

**Historical Background:**

This play is set in the Autumn of 1916, during the cataclysmic Somme campaign of World War I, which was one of the most terrible battles in war history. Enormous British losses were experienced on the first day alone, many of them wiping out whole generations of young men in areas of Britain. The Army Nurses and VADS, on the spot throughout the campaign, saw the worst of it and had to cope with the aftermath, often with great courage. The VADS were completely voluntary, many were delicately raised and had no idea of the work they would do. Somehow they coped, but at unknown cost to themselves.

**Costume:**

The nurses wear VAD uniform: blue dresses, white aprons with bibs, and a red cross on the bib. Hair in a 'coif' wound round the head and tying at the nape of the neck.

Sister wears the grey uniform of the Q.A. Nurses: white apron and cuffs, and a short red cape. She has a square Army cap on her head.

*[Pictures of these can be found in occupational costume books].*

## **The Nursing Procedure:**

*[See Pages 13-14].*

Since all producers have their own ideas, detailed stage directions have not been given in the text, but these were the nursing procedures as performed by my own company (with the advice of a trained nurse advisor!).

Specific tasks are up to the individual choice of the producer, but I have indicated characters where what they do affects the plot. It will take rehearsal to see where the procedures fit into the text.

**START:** *(page 13)*

**Sister:** How is Nurse Hall?

1. ***SISTER examines EVE's hand.***
2. ***Bandages unwound. Dressing Tray uncovered (it contains lotion, forceps, dressings, syringe and ampules, brandy bottle - these can be fabricated).***
3. ***Gauze dressing left on wound. VINNIE takes it off and reacts.***
4. ***EVE is held down.***
5. ***Syringe filled, dose checked and EVE given an injection.***
6. ***EVE's pulse checked.***
7. ***Lotion into a kidney dish. Someone stands by SISTER holding it.***
8. ***SISTER dips a dressing into the lotion, using forceps and applies it to the wound. EVE yells.***
9. ***Reaction from others.***
10. ***Procedure repeated. Then forceps back on tray.***
11. ***Re-bandage.***

## IS THERE HONEY STILL?

by Claire Jones

*Scene: A room in the Nurses' Quarters of a Field Hospital, near the SOMME BATTLEFIELDS. Autumn 1916.*

*(A minimum of furniture. Four Camp Beds, with orange boxes, which serve as Lockers. Spare Clothes hang from the back wall, a V.A.D. Recruiting Poster is on this wall. The room is tidy, but there are some indications of inhabitation, pictures by the beds, a few clothes scattered. On the end bed there is a Hatbox. EVE lies in bed, partly screened off, asleep.*

*A distant mutter of guns is heard, as ELIZABETH enters, dressed for travelling, and carrying a small case. She looks about her uncertainly).*

**Elizabeth:** Hello? Anyone about? *(Sees EVE).* Oh, did I wake you up .... I'm sorry ....

*(GRACE enters from the back, yawning. She is untidy, her uniform unbuttoned, and straps hanging).*

**Grace:** *(Sharply).* Don't touch her!

**Elizabeth:** I wasn't going to. Is she ....?

**Grace:** Under morphia. Septicaemia.

**Elizabeth:** What happened?

**Grace:** Had a cut finger, and didn't cover up when she was dressing a gangrene.

**Elizabeth:** I see. It's easily done.

**Grace:** They're hoping to save her hand but at this stage .... who are you?

**Elizabeth:** Oh .... Elizabeth Kenyon. I've just arrived from England.

**Grace:** Glad to see you. We need all the help we can. I'm Grace Jennings, the night VAD. The maid should have brought your luggage up. Where is she?

**Elizabeth:** I don't know .... she went off with it ....

**Grace:** *(Looking at her shrewdly. Nervous?)*

**Elizabeth:** *(Shaky smile).* A little, I suppose. It's mainly the crossing. That was beastly. I don't think my stomach's back in the right place yet.

**Grace:** Sit down. I'll see to things. *(She calls out of the door).* Marie! Come in here, you lazy cow! *(ELIZABETH reacts to this).* If I know her, she's out in the yard, gossiping with someone.

*(MARIE, a young peasant girl comes in, sulkily).*

**Grace:** Ah, there you are. What's the excuse this time?

**Marie:** Pardon, Mamzelle, but the soup boils over.

**Grace:** That WILL be the day. I've been here a year, and the dishwater they call soup, doesn't know what hot means.

**Marie:** Pardon?

**Grace:** All right, now where's Sister's luggage?

**Marie:** I am told to leave it alone, for two chambres .... er ....

**Grace:** Rooms.

**Marie:** Yes .... two rooms for the new ladies must be find.

**Grace:** Two?

**Marie:** Madame said ....

**Grace:** That's funny, we weren't expecting two. We knew you were coming, of course, should have had extra help long ago, nobody said anything ....

**Elizabeth:** (*Opening her eyes*). There was another lady on the transport. I don't know if she was coming here.

**Grace:** Oh well, we'll be the last to know, as usual. All right, Marie, that will be all.

**Marie:** (*Resentful*). Ca va.

(*MARIE goes out*).

**Grace:** (*Calling after her*). And be a bit quicker next time! (*To ELIZABETH*). Sorry about the noise, but you have to treat them like the house parlourmaid, or they take no notice. We'll find your things a bit later, when they stop panicking.

**Elizabeth:** You called me Sister. I'm only a VAD, like you.

**Grace:** Oh yes, I know, but we're all Sister to the French and the patients here. We've given up trying to tell them. Even Sister in Charge accepts it now - though we're all Nurse So-and-So to her, of course.

**Elizabeth:** Is she all right?

**Grace:** Sister? Yes, she'll do. She's hardly older than any of us, but trained at Thomas's. She's good. Was nursing in Turkey till a few weeks ago.

**Elizabeth:** Are there many of us?

**Grace:** Not many. Mixed lot we are. In that end bed is Vinnie - Lady Lavinia, if you please, daughter of a so-called belted Earl, so start practising your Court Curtsy.

**Elizabeth:** Oh! ....

**Grace:** Oh, she's all right - bit full of who she is, but then you'd expect that. I'm like a red rag to a bull to her - can't resist the odd needle, she lays herself open, silly bitch.

**Elizabeth:** *(For something to say)*. What's your family like?

**Grace:** Vicar's daughter. *(ELIZABETH laughs, unbelievably)*. Go on, they all laugh. East End Parish. Language courtesy of Holloway Prison. *(Pause)*. Suffragette .... but that's another story. Don't worry, you'll get on with us all - you'll have to - even Vinnie. She's a good nurse, apart from preferring officers only, but we have to be, or we wouldn't be here.

**Elizabeth:** *(Shakily)*. Perhaps I ought to find out where to go.

**Grace:** No, sit down, you're all in. They'll know where you are. This is the biggest room, so we all come here. The rest are all broom cupboards. Still, we ought to be thankful we're not still under canvas. *(She gets up to look at EVE)*. At least we've got a solid roof ....

*(There is a loud crash off)*.

**Grace:** At the moment.

**Elizabeth:** Whatever's that?

**Grace:** That is her Ladyship, coming off duty, slamming the door, coming down the hall like a platoon of infantrymen, and uttering the immortal words ....

**Vinnie:** *(Entering and overlapping GRACE'S words)* .... Ooh, my feet!

*(She flops on her bed. Her friend, THEA, follows her in. ELIZABETH giggles, and GRACE, with EVE, waves, as if to say, "YOU SEE!")*.

**Vinnie:** *(Yells)*. Marie!!

**Thea:** Sshh!

*(MARIE enters quickly)*.

**Marie:** *(Her face brightening at the sight of VINNIE)*. Oh, Madame La Contesse. Your 'ot water, I get it.

*(MARIE dashes out again)*.

**Vinnie:** *(To ELIZABETH)*. Hello, you new?

**Grace:** Elizabeth, - Vinnie Montague and Dorothy Smythe.

**Thea:** Thea. . . . how do you do? *(They all nod politely at each other)*. How's Eve? Any change? Sister said she'd be up soon.

**Grace:** Not much.

**Thea:** *(Joining GRACE)*. Morphia wearing off?

**Grace:** Not yet, thank heavens, though she's getting a bit restless.

**Vinnie:** It's a dashed nuisance. I've had all her flea-ridden men to wash this morning. Honestly, they were crawling.

**Thea:** How the other half lives, darling.

**Vinnie:** Officers don't crawl.

**Grace:** That's a matter of opinion.

**Vinnie:** Oh well, we all know your superior knowledge of officers, Gracie dear.  
(Pause). Where's ....

**Thea:** Just coming.

**Vinnie:** I hope you're broad-minded, Elizabeth.

**Elizabeth:** Yes, why?

**Vinnie:** Let's hope so, when you meet the next of our happy band.

**Thea:** Oh, she's nice enough, works hard .... but .... well ....

**Vinnie:** Father's a lecturer - now - they come from Cambridge, but you see, my dear, they're rather .... nouveau riche.

**Thea:** Not quite our class, and .... er .... (Fingers her nose significantly).

**Grace:** You two are disgusting little snobs.

**Vinnie:** Oh no, not snobs, Grace. After all, one gets to mix with some very strange people in wartime - but there are standards.

**Grace:** We are in the middle of a bloody Armageddon, and you worry about standards. I despair!

**Thea:** (Hastily). I'm right down in Sister's standards, anyway. Another thermometer today.

**Grace:** What do you do with them? Eat them?

**Thea:** It wasn't my fault. I'd just stuck it in someone's mouth when a huge great shell came over the roof and shook it right out again. (Laughter). It's the truth! Sister didn't believe me either. And to cap it all, I think she saw me last night, by the railway bridge.

**Vinnie:** With whom, doing what?

**Thea:** (Indignant). Nothing! Just a walk with a .... friend. But she saw me, I'm sure. She rode past in a staff car.

**Grace:** She's probably writing out your sailing pass this minute. (Pause). Vinnie, there's a box on your bed. Came on the transport.

**Vinnie:** Oh topping! I've been waiting for this.

(She grabs for the box. MARIE pants in with a bowl of water, followed by RUTH).

**Ruth:** For heaven's sake, relieve this lunatic of the basin, someone, before she starts the second flood.

**Vinnie:** (Taking the basin and putting it on the floor). Thank you Marie. You may wear my Sunday hat to church next week.

**Marie:** Oh thank you, Comtesse.

**Vinnie:** *(As if ordering in a restaurant).* I'll have some of that soup when it's ready.

**Grace:** *(Sarcastic).* In the meantime .... a little caviar, perhaps?

**Marie:** Mamzelle?

**Thea:** Thank you Marie.

*(MARIE goes out puzzled. RUTH has been to look at EVE, she catches ELIZABETH'S eye, and they shake hands).*

**Ruth:** Ruth Goldberg.

*(VINNIE and THEA giggle to each other. ELIZABETH is embarrassed, RUTH ignores them and takes a book to read on her bed).*

**Grace:** *(To ease the situation).* May one ask Madame the Comtesse why she isn't on duty. Or any of you?

**Thea:** Stand down.

**Vinnie:** Sister said we could come over for a time.

**Ruth:** *(Looking up).* They're expecting something.

**Grace:** Oh, that explains it. That's why I couldn't sleep. Whenever there's anything expected, I always get insomnia.

**Vinnie:** I wondered why your snores weren't filling the air as usual.

**Grace:** I don't snore.

**Thea:** I wonder who told you that.

*(She and VINNIE whisper and giggle).*

**Thea:** I say, Vinnie, am I right? Did I hear you promise Marie your Sunday hat?

**Vinnie:** Yes.

*(She takes off her shoes and stockings).*

**Grace:** And what do you intend to wear to church? An artillery helmet?

**Vinnie:** Rather becoming, darling, but no. After all, one is within messenger distance of Paris, so one might as well take advantage.

*(She puts her feet into the basin, ecstatically, and picks up the hat box).*

**Vinnie:** So I wrote to Daddy and he wrote to WORTH, and voila!

*(She produces a lavishly trimmed hat and holds it up to be admired. Then puts it on. The others look at her, feet in water, and the hat on top of her nursing veil, and all laugh).*

**Thea:** Oh, if you could just SEE yourself ....

*(EVE stirs and cries out. They all quieten).*

**Ruth:** *(Rolling over).* Eve .... can you hear us?

**Eve:** My hand ....

**Ruth:** Sister's coming soon to see it.

**Grace:** D'you want a drink?

**Eve:** Yes.

**Thea:** I'll get it.

*(THEA goes out).*

**Eve:** Can I sit up?

**Grace:** Yes, but careful now. Take her head, Ruth.

**Eve:** *(Sitting up).* Who's that?

**Elizabeth:** Hello, I'm Elizabeth.

**Eve:** Are you new?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Eve:** I thought it was Clare.

*(THEA brings in a drink and they help EVE with it).*

**Elizabeth:** Clare?

**Grace:** She worked with us, earlier on. She went home after her husband was killed in the early skirmishes.

**Elizabeth:** Were they great friends?

**Grace:** At school together. Clare married very young. Only a few months ....

**Elizabeth:** Poor thing.

**Eve:** Why's Vinnie wearing a bird?

**Vinnie:** *(Trying to clown).* How dare you? That's my new hat Evie. Straight from Paris. Like it?

**Eve:** *(Lying back weakly).* It's silly.

**Vinnie:** I'll have you know it's not silly *(Takes off hat).* This chapeau is perfectly ....

**Ruth:** She's asleep again.

*(VINNIE stares at the hat, then suddenly throws it across the room and rips off her nursing veil).*

**Vinnie:** Oh God, how disgusting!

**Thea:** What's the matter?

**Vinnie:** That hat - that's what. It's got lice.

**Thea:** Lice?

**Vinnie:** It's infested. Ugh! In my hair. I feel sick.

**Grace:** That'll teach you to nurse other ranks.

**Vinnie:** Filthy beastly, common men ....

**Ruth:** *(Suddenly)*. Shut up Vinnie!

*(VINNIE stares at her).*

**Thea:** Who do you think you're talking to?

**Ruth:** Her. Those are men you're talking about .... people! Just like your precious officers. *(Pause)*.

**Vinnie:** *(Sensing hostility)*. I'm .... going to wash my hair.

*(VINNIE goes out).*

**Thea:** *(After pause)*. Putting in for Sister's job, are we? Or the Chaplain's?

**Ruth:** If she still thinks nursing is putting her hand on fevered brows, she oughtn't to be here.

*(MARIE comes in with a tray of soup, which she hands round).*

**Thea:** *(To ELIZABETH)*. Here you are, you're probably cold after your journey.

**Elizabeth:** *(Doubtfully)*. Thank you. *(The soup is dreadful)*.

**Thea:** Marie - What DO you put in this?

**Marie:** I do not make.

**Grace:** Untouched by human hand, apparently.

**Marie:** My mother make. Today there are some turnips, and I think, a rabbit.

**Thea:** Someone shot a rabbit?

**Grace:** Judging by this, it lay down, and waited for the coup de grace.

**Marie:** *(Offended)*. We do what we can, Mamzelle. And the men, they tell me that in other places such as this, the sisters must cook for themselves.

**Grace:** Oh, don't get huffy, you great chump.

**Marie:** Always you must laugh.

**Thea:** Oh dear, another set of bruised feelings.

*(VINNIE enters, head in a towel, carrying her hat).*

**Vinnie:** Ah, there you are, Marie. I was coming to find you. You can wear my new hat to meet your boyfriend tonight, if you like.

**Thea:** Oh, Vinnie, no ....

**Marie:** But you do not mean it? *(Takes hat)*. Oh, I see it is a little dirty, but no matter - I will soon clean it. Thank you, Comtesse, YOU are so different.

*(MARIE goes out excitedly).*

**Grace:** That'll teach you. You might have known an odd louse or two wouldn't bother her.

**Vinnie:** *(Put out)*. She's no business to have boyfriends at her age, anyway.

**Grace:** Makes a difference when they're so wretched at the front.

*(A pause. VINNIE fidgets restlessly. Looks at ELIZABETH, who is still travel-sick, and winks at THEA, who responds).*

**Thea:** Ugh - I can't eat any more. Elizabeth?

**Elizabeth:** *(Queasy)*. No thank you.

**Vinnie:** *(Carefully)*. Sure?

*(GRACE takes the bowls out. RUTH with EVE).*

**Vinnie:** Soup's better than usual, I suppose.

**Thea:** *(Looking at her watch)*. Better than the other day on the ward.

*(As RUTH is distracted, they both watch ELIZABETH).*

**Vinnie:** That's when they found the drowned rat, wasn't it?

**Thea:** Good thing Sister didn't know. The orderly sent it in anyway. The men had to eat something.

**Vinnie:** Funny how you get used to the rats, isn't it?

**Thea:** I'll never get used to the size.

**Vinnie:** It's when you're on night duty, and you can hear their pattering feet ....

**Ruth:** *(Realising)*. Vinnie ....

*(EVE mutters something, and she turns back).*

**Vinnie:** *(Indicating EVE)*. Did they tell you? - gas gangrene?

**Elizabeth:** *(Faintly)*. Yes.

**Thea:** She could have got it from half a dozen.

**Vinnie:** All those endless septic dressings.

**Thea:** One after another.

**Vinnie:** And the smell ....

*(GRACE comes in, and catches the drift).*

**Grace:** Dammit, Vinnie ....

**Thea:** When they first come in. You can smell it over all the mud and the torn clothes.

**Vinnie:** *(Defiant)*. And blood....

**Elizabeth:** *(Rising)*. Excuse me. I think I'll go and wash ....

**Thea:** Just down the steps, on your right.

*(ELIZABETH stumbles out).*

**Vinnie:** How long?

**Thea:** Three and a half minutes.

**Vinnie:** You owe me.

*(THEA flips her half a crown and goes out).*

**Grace:** Been up to your old tricks? Ruth, why didn't you ....

**Ruth:** I was busy with Eve. You two ought to be ashamed.

**Vinnie:** Why should we? Better here than in the wards. They've all got to be toughened up.

**Ruth:** But they learn, like we all had to.

**Grace:** Honestly, I don't know what's got into you today.

**Ruth:** You're so restless you'll wear yourself out.

**Vinnie:** I can take care of myself, thank you. *(Pause)*. How's Evie?

**Ruth:** Morphia's wearing off.

**Vinnie:** *(Looking frightened)*. Oh. *(Pause. Then cheerfully)*. Thea can get her revenge on the next one. There's the one about the shell-shock case who ....

*(CLARE, a young war widow, enters quietly).*

**Clare:** It'll take a lot more than that to turn my stomach.

**Grace:** Clare!

**Clare:** Told you I'd be back.

**Grace:** We didn't expect .... how are you?

**Clare:** All right.

*(Pause, then she and GRACE hug, without words).*

**Grace:** *(To the OTHERS).* This is Clare, who was with Eve and me at Rouen ....  
Vinnie .... Ruth ....

**Clare:** Eve? Is she still here?

**Grace:** Over there.

**Clare:** What ....? Oh, God, Sepsis? *(GRACE nods, and CLARE sits on EVE'S bed).* Haven't they made you wear gloves yet? After two years? *(Bitterly).*  
Not much change is there? Even still play the old war-wound game?

**Ruth:** Childish!

**Vinnie:** Necessary.

*(VINNIE picks up the water, and stalks out).*

**Clare:** *(Looking after her).* Oooh!

**Grace:** That's the first time it's been tried on since this campaign started, but the devil's in her today. I think it was aimed at me, actually. They'd love to shake my rock-like exterior.

**Ruth:** Jealous.

**Clare:** Yes, she looked the type. Well off?

**Grace:** Father an Earl, only girl.

**Clare:** Oh well, enough said.

**Grace:** I met her in Le Havre one day off. I was coming out of an hotel with an officer. She went quite green - never really forgave me.

**Ruth:** You were what?

**Grace:** My brother in law.

*(CLARE pauses in unpacking).*

**Ruth:** Sister doesn't let anyone ....

**Grace:** Sister didn't know. And I certainly wasn't going to ask permission for a pot of coffee and a bath.

**Clare:** Grace, you didn't ....

**Grace:** An hour's soak .... carpet underfoot, and hot water!

**Ruth:** *(Enviously).* Stop it!

**Grace:** So that's the cause of Vinnie's little tantrum. Mild, isn't it?

*(MARIE comes in with an armful of bedding).*

**Marie:** Madame, for your bed .... you are to sleep here.

**Clare:** *(Flustered).* Oh .... thank you.

**Ruth:** Give it here.

*(RUTH takes bedding. MARIE goes out).*

**Clare:** Still the same old Grace? Be careful.

**Grace:** I told you ....

**Clare:** And I remember you also told me you were an only child.

*(GRACE bites her lip).*

**Clare:** Thank you Ruth. *(Makes up her bed).* How long has Eve been like this?

**Ruth:** Two days. They'll send her home if .... when the fever drops.

**Grace:** I'll get another cold cloth.

**Clare:** I brought her a present from London. *(Holds up a book).*

**Grace:** What is it? Oh .... poetry. Those two, always spouting.

**Clare:** It's Rupert Brooke. The complete one. I thought she'd like it.

**Ruth:** Oh .... can I see, please?

**Clare:** *(Handing it over).* You like him?

**Grace:** *(On her way out).* Sure as eggs, whenever Clare arrives, everyone starts speaking in verse.

**Ruth:** Yes, I do like his stuff.

**Clare:** Dear Grace, she does hate poetry. Eve and I used to read it when we were off duty, and she felt left out! Brooke was Eve's favourite.

**Ruth:** *(Simply).* He was rather special.

**Clare:** You talk as if you knew him.

**Ruth:** Well - I did a bit.... hardly at all really .... my family live in Cambridge, and before the war .... we used to see ....

**Clare:** What was he like? Did you meet him?

**Ruth:** At a party on the river. We didn't go to many .... you see .... er, my family being Jewish, we didn't mix quite as much .... but I did speak to him. I was still at school and I kept blushing - it was so embarrassing - but he was quite kind. We saw all his crowd of people round Cambridge - they seemed very special.

**Clare:** They must have been.

**Ruth:** He was in love, you know - with a very ordinary lady - you wondered what she had ....

**Clare:** How did you know all this?

**Ruth:** *(Casual)*. Oh ... small community. You hear things. *(Turns over the book pages)*. He wouldn't write like this now. If he'd come here to this dreadful place, he'd never have written anything that mattered again. Perhaps it was just as well he died before he saw it .... *(Then blushing)*. Sorry, that's just what I think .... The ones who come through this will never be the same.

**Grace:** *(Entering with a cloth for EVE)*. The end of innocence?

**Ruth:** We're the survivors, aren't we? Of more than just a battle, of a way of life. There's too much of our lives out there in the mud.

*(She breaks off in confusion, as she sees CLARE put a photo on her locker).*

**Clare:** *(Kindly)*. It's all right, Ruth. Don't be too tactful.

*(VINNIE, carrying a dressing tray enters, signalling that she's being followed. SISTER follows her in).*

**Sister:** Good afternoon.

**All:** Good afternoon Sister.

**Sister:** How is Nurse Hall? *(Examines EVE'S hand)*.

**Grace:** *(Formally)*. Conscious on and off, Sister. Some pain, pulse is fast. *(She shows SISTER EVE'S notes)*.

**Sister:** I see. It is a pity we can't have her in the main hospital block, but there are so few beds, and I'm worried about cross-infection. *(Looking at hand)*. Yes ... we'd better try some more Carrel and Dakin on it, I suppose. Hello, Eve, it's Sister, come to look at your hand. Nurse Montague, YOU ask Marie for some hot water, we need it quickly.

*(She says this without conscious humour, but VINNIE rolls her eyes to heaven).*

**Vinnie:** Yes Sister.

*(VINNIE hurries out).*

**Sister:** I met Nurse Kenyon downstairs. She seems - unwell?

**Ruth:** A little travel-sick, I think Sister.

**Sister:** Ah well, that will soon pass. She's been allotted a room, and will go on duty with you for a brief spell tonight, Nurse.

**Grace:** Yes Sister.

**Sister:** *(To CLARE, who is undoing EVE'S dressing).* Good afternoon, Nurse. I'm sure that you will be most useful. *(They know each other).*

**Clare:** Good afternoon, Sister.

**Sister:** You are recovered?

**Clare:** Yes, thank you.

**Sister:** I am working on a new duty rota for all of you.

*(THEA enters in hurry, sees SISTER, and grinds to a halt).*

**Sister:** Ah yes, Nurse, I wanted to see you.

**Thea:** *(Panicking).* Yes Sister?

**Sister:** Please lengthen your skirt. *(THEA'S skirt is tucked up in her belt. She untucks it hastily).* Heaven knows I'm no prude, but I do have to run this unit, and I cannot have my patients being disturbed by the sight of your legs.

**Thea:** *(With a sigh of relief).* Sorry Sister.

**Sister:** One more thing while I'm here.

*(VINNIE enters, with a basin of water, followed by ELIZABETH in uniform, looking better).*

**Sister:** I came back from Stand-off yesterday evening by way of the railway bridge. *(THEA shuffles).* Didn't I see you wearing a red scarf with your uniform as I passed?

**Thea:** It had a small stripe on it.

**Sister:** Do not wear it again, please. Stripes are not permitted with uniform.

*[At this point the Nursing Procedure commences. For a detailed description of the moves and characters involved, see the **Production Notes** to the play].*

**Grace:** *(Very quietly).* Yes, but uniform is permitted with stripes.

**Thea:** *(Equally quietly).* Slut!

**Sister:** Please soak the dressing off, Nurse.

*(VINNIE does this).*

**Thea:** Was .... was that all, Sister?

**Sister:** This time, Nurse.

*(VINNIE looks at the exposed hand, and gulps. SISTER turns to ELIZABETH).*

**Sister:** Will you help me now, please, Nurse.

**Elizabeth:** (*Formally*). Yes Sister.

**Sister:** She'll need holding.

**Clare:** May I, Sister? (*SISTER assents*). Eve .... it's Clare, dear. Keep still, we're going to put something on your hand.

**Eve:** No .... don't!

**Clare:** It'll be all right ....

**Elizabeth:** (*Professionally*). Sepsis is much advanced, isn't it?

**Sister:** Yes, I'm afraid so. One quarter of a grain morphia.

(*Procedure*).

**Sister:** (*To the others*). We shan't need you, Nurses.

**Vinnie:** She's one of us, Sister.

(*As the Procedure continues, there is a long prolonged reaction from EVE. The NURSES all react also. VINNIE sways and THEA hastily pushes her head down*).

**Elizabeth:** How much pressure, Sister?

**Sister:** That's about right, Nurse. Maintain that.

**Elizabeth:** A fresh bandage?

**Sister:** Please.

**Clare:** (*Massaging her hand*). All over ....

**Elizabeth:** Brave girl.

**Grace:** Will it be all right, Sister?

**Sister:** I'll ask Doctor to come over as soon as he can. (*Straightens up and stretches her back*). So far, it's all right, but there's no improvement. (*To ELIZABETH*). Thank you Nurse. Thank you all. I do realise what a strain it is. (*To THEA*). Nurse. On duty, please.

**Thea:** Oh. Yes Sister.

**Sister:** (*To GRACE*). And try to get some sleep. You're in for a busy night.

**Grace:** Yes. I'll try.

**Sister:** Very well.

(*She goes out. The others relax*).

**Vinnie:** Oh God, I nearly fainted.

**Ruth:** (*Ironically*). There's brandy on the tray.

*(She gets some for VINNIE).*

**Vinnie:** *(Sincerely for once).* Thank you.

**Grace:** I did think I was used to all that by now.

*(They agree).*

**Clare:** I suppose it's all right sloshing Carrel and Dakin on anonymous soldiers, and another when it's one of the people you live with - is that right?

**Thea:** It certainly is. How's she taken it?

**Clare:** All right, I think.

**Vinnie:** *(To ELIZABETH).* And let's look at you. Recovered quickly, didn't you?

**Elizabeth:** *(A little smugly).* I always get travel sick. I ought to have told you. Nothing else. I trained at Dover, you see.

*(They look at each other, understanding).*

**Elizabeth:** We got the cases just as you sent them over - so there isn't anything I haven't seen, since July. Except the rats of course, but I expect they're the same anywhere.

**Thea:** Well, must obey orders, I suppose. See you later. *(She passes ELIZABETH and pats her shoulder).* You've certainly begun well.

*(THEA looks at VINNIE who flips her back the half-crown, and then goes out).*

**Elizabeth:** *(Clearing up the dressing tray).* That stuff smells foul, doesn't it? I've always hated it.

**Grace:** I don't think it does all that much good, except for hurting like hell. Well - I'm going to get some sleep.

*(GRACE goes out into the back. ELIZABETH and CLARE introduce themselves).*

**Clare:** So you trained in Dover?

**Elizabeth:** *(Busy).* Yes.

**Vinnie:** You know, when you're here, you forget there are people at home doing just the same as you are.

**Elizabeth:** The week before all this started here - at the end of June, you could hear the gun barrages quite clearly in Kent.

**Vinnie:** *(Tensely).* Yes, where I live in Surrey, too.

**Ruth:** *(Hastily).* Grace said it nearly split your eardrums out here.

**Elizabeth:** I thought then - what sort of man could live through all that? I couldn't. I wouldn't have the courage to do what they're doing.

**Ruth:** Yes, but when it comes down to it, it takes a lot more courage to say, "No I won't". Or even to do what we're doing and pick up the bits.

**Vinnie:** (*Bitterly*). The young VADs. Finishing school of 1914. And they say the uniform is SO attractive!

*(They stop what they are doing for a minute, to listen).*

**Ruth:** Well, after all, Vinnie, noblesse oblige.

**Vinnie:** Do you think I wanted any of this? I would have come out, been presented at court, parties and fun, but then it was - "the boys join father's regiment and Vinnie must be a nurse". Don't you think I'd rather be getting married and having a family? When this is over, there won't be anyone left to marry. All the men I knew are dead or wounded. I've lost three brothers already - David only a few weeks ago on the First Day. Thea .... they were going to be married. Look at her now - she's getting like Grace. She doesn't care any more.

**Clare:** Vinnie - you mustn't ....

**Vinnie:** Oh, I don't care about Grace and her little affairs. If she can keep her sanity that way, good luck to her! But my family - there's only Edward left, seventeen, just left school - what can I say to him? Grace called me a snob, but when the family name goes back to the Middle Ages, and you see it going under a few miles of mud - (*Turns abruptly to CLARE*). You're the lucky one - you had your life with him - you've got that to remember ....

**Clare:** (*After a pause*). Yes Vinnie, I expect I have ....

**Vinnie:** I want to go home so much - to have someone to do things for you instead of taking orders, baths, chocolates, nice clothes .... being safe .... (*Getting tearful*).

**Ruth:** Stop it Vinnie, you're getting carried away.

**Vinnie:** (*To an embarrassed ELIZABETH*). I do apologise, Elizabeth, this isn't like us at all. Grace ought to be here to slap me down. And I'd need it. We're usually too tired and crotchety to think of anything but work and handsome officers.

**Ruth:** (*Relieved*). Teasing each other and Rupert Brooke.

**Vinnie:** It's Eve. She's affected all of us.

**Clare:** Listen ....

*(They stop. The sound of guns suddenly swells. A shell whistles overhead. They grab bags and headgear. SISTER hurries in with MARIE).*

**Sister:** On duty, everyone. There's an alert.

**Elizabeth:** May I go, please Sister?

**Sister:** If you feel up to it.

*(She knocks at GRACE'S door, and GRACE appears sleepily).*

**Sister:** It is an early call, Nurse, but you're needed.

**Grace:** Yes Sister.

*(They all go except SISTER and CLARE).*

**Sister:** Just a minute, Nurse.

**Clare:** I'll go on duty straight away, Sister .... I'll just change into uniform ....

**Sister:** That's all right. Marie .... will you take that dressing tray straight back to the ward and then come back and listen in case Mademoiselle Hall wants anything.

**Marie:** Madame, you have not eaten.

**Sister:** *(Weary).* I can't remember ....

**Marie:** My mother say you will be ill if you work so hard. I will fetch you some coffee.

**Sister:** Oh no ....

**Marie:** And you will drink it, Madame, or I will send my mother to see you do.

**Sister:** Very well, thank you. I'll wait here for a minute.

*(MARIE goes out).*

**Sister:** Marie's mother has the general persuasive powers of a large armoured car.

**Clare:** *(Smiling).* She must be a good weapon.

**Sister:** *(Sitting down wearily).* Yes.

**Clare:** Frances ....

**Sister:** It will be good to have you back, Clare. We need you here. I hope you won't find it hard going.

**Clare:** I'll manage.

**Sister:** Do the others know much?

**Clare:** Only Grace and Eve.

**Sister:** Eve won't be with us much longer .... *(She interrupts CLARE quickly).*  
Either way.

**Clare:** It's what I need. Hard work. The silence at home is worse.

**Sister:** How's mother?

**Clare:** Better now. I wish you'd been there. I was no help. In her eyes, I was

never good enough for him.

*(Before SISTER can answer, MARIE comes in with coffee).*

**Marie:** Here you are Madame. The Doctor know where you are, but I tell him you will soon come.

**Sister:** Thank you very much Marie, but ....

**Clare:** Oh do as Nanny says.

**Sister:** *(Smiling)*. Yes I will. I'll not be long, Marie.

*(MARIE goes).*

**Sister:** Clare, I'd no idea you thought we didn't want you to marry Walter. That's just not so.

**Clare:** I don't want to be rude, but you would say that.

**Sister:** It was him, not you. He was such a dreamer. Getting married - we hoped that he knew what a responsibility he was taking on. Not the best way to think of one's brother - but when we saw you, we realised that he'd chosen well.

**Clare:** Thank you. I didn't think .... *(Pause)*. There was going to be a child.

**Sister:** Oh Clare.

**Clare:** False hopes. No-one knew. It's unreal now, I've put it behind me.

**Sister:** I wish I could ....

**Clare:** I have to tell you something else. If we're working together. You should know. No one else.

**Sister:** What is it?

**Clare:** You may want to transfer me ....

**Sister:** *(Alarmed)*. For heaven's sake, Clare, what ....

**Clare:** After I got that dreadful anonymous telegram, I wanted to know more. I went to his Commanding Officer. He seemed to be hiding something .... so I put some pressure on, kept up enquiries - and Walter wasn't killed, Frances. Not like they said. He was in one of those suicide pushes, early on. The ones where they never even got as far as the wire. And he must have stood there, and looked at the pointlessness of it - we've all felt it too - and so he turned round, I was told, and simply walked away from it.

**Sister:** What?

**Clare:** So they shot him, you see. As a deserter.

**Sister:** Oh my God!

*(Pause).*

**Clare:** You're his sister, my being here would be an embarrassment now. I'll do what you want. I can't tell you my own feelings yet but at least I can shut them down with some hard work.

**Sister:** I don't know what to say.

**Clare:** I don't think he was a coward. I just think he wanted life, not death. There must be many others, only they don't make the gesture. I think that's what it was for him.

**Sister:** *(Who is having a struggle to come to terms).* Yes. *(Pause).* Yes. *(She gets up).* You can stay, Clare, if that's what you want. I shall never say anything.

**Clare:** Thank you.

*(She waits, but there's no more).*

**Sister:** I'll have to think. I feel numb. I just don't know.

*(The barrage starts again).*

**Sister:** I must go.

**Eve:** *(Waking to the noise).* They're going to shoot my hand off!

*(SISTER and CLARE go to her).*

**Sister:** I'll get Marie.

**Clare:** Shall I stay?

**Sister:** Perhaps that would be best, she shouldn't be left. *(Goes to door).* Clare - we haven't always treated you as we should at home. I'm sorry. You're very brave. And we'll try to cope with it together. Thank you.

*(She goes out. The guns increase, and there is a call for stretcher bearers).*

**Eve:** Don't let them take me away ....

**Clare:** *(Holding her).* I won't .... Steady now. It's all right.

**Eve:** Oh, it hurts!

**Clare:** *(As she would to a child).* Go to sleep, and then when you wake up, it'll all feel better.

**Eve:** Take me home.

**Clare:** Not now.

**Eve:** *(Scream).* I want to go home ....

**Clare:** I've brought you a present from home. *(Finds the book).* Poems. We can read them when you're better.

**Eve:** Read one now and drown the guns out. Remember Clare? You used to do that. But not about war.

**Clare:** Not about war. About home. Listen ....

Say, is there beauty yet to find  
And Certainty? And quiet Kind  
Deep meadows yet .... for to forget  
The lies and truths and pains (*Pause*). oh yet ....  
Stands the church clock at ten to three  
And is there honey still for tea?

*(Eve is still. The guns increase).*

**CURTAIN**