

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE IS A LILY

By Kate Guyton

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SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE IS A LILY

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SYNOPSIS: During WWI, Lily graduates from high school and becomes a nurse on the front lines in France. This all-female historical drama explores the role of women in WWI and how their service helped shape the early women's movement in America and throughout the world.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(14 females, 0-15 extras)

LILY (f)	A young lady who becomes a nurse. <i>(143 lines)</i>
ELSIE (f).....	Lily's mother. <i>(76 lines)</i>
VIRGINIA (f)	Lily's cousin. <i>(71 lines)</i>
SARAH (f).....	Fellow applicant. <i>(33 lines)</i>
DENISE (f)	Secretary. <i>(20 lines)</i>
KAREN (f).....	Student. <i>(7 lines)</i>
LAURA (f).....	Student. <i>(6 lines)</i>
AMY (f)	Student. <i>(5 lines)</i>
MRS. THOMPSON (f)	Teacher. <i>(4 lines)</i>
CLAIRE (f).....	Nurse. <i>(83 lines)</i>
OLIVIA (f).....	Nurse. <i>(26 lines)</i>
KATE (f).....	Nurse. <i>(43 lines)</i>
AGATHA (f).....	Charge nurse. <i>(35 lines)</i>
MARY (f).....	Olivia's sister. <i>(26 lines)</i>

EXTRAS:

ENSEMBLE (f).....	Students, nurses, applicants, soldiers in hospital, etc. <i>(Non-speaking)</i>
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DURATION: 70 minutes

TIME: Spring, 1917

SETTING: USA and War-torn France

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This play is based on actual letters written by World War I nurses and their loved ones. The names and details have been altered, but the sentiment is intact.

SETTING REQUIREMENTS

The set can be as simple as black boxes and cots or as elaborate as the budget allows. However, if budgeting is restrictive, simply allow costumes, props and lighting to emphasize time period/setting.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: Kitchen with an oven and ice box

SCENE 2: Registration with a sign "Nurse Registration"

SCENE 3: Last day of class

SCENE 4: Lily's monologue

SCENE 5: Nurses' dormitory with a chest of drawers

SCENE 6: Kitchen (Letter from Virginia)

SCENE 7: Nurses' dormitory (Mary the Canary)

OPTIONAL INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: Nurses' dormitory (Writing desks)

SCENE 2: Infirmary

SCENE 3: Nurses' dormitory (Writing desks)

SCENE 4: Bare stage (Jump roping)

SCENE 5: Storage room (Armistice Day)

SCENE 6: The English girls / Lily's letter home

SCENE 7: Journey home

PROPS

- Textbook (Lily)
- Newspaper
- Broom (Elsie)
- Waste bin
- Bag and letter (Virginia)
- Plate of food (Elsie)
- Forms
- Rag (Mrs. Thompson)
- Music books
- Suitcase with clothes (Olivia)
- Hairpins (Claire)
- Suitcase with clothes and bottle of perfume (Lily)
- Book (Claire)
- Quilt (Lily)
- Suitcase (Mary)
- Pens, paper, envelopes (Lily, Claire, Olivia, Kate)
- Tray of bandages (Agatha)
- Two oil lamps (Mary)
- Breakfast tray (Lily)
- Bar of soap (Kate)
- Newspaper (Mary)
- Letter (Virginia)

MUSIC

- “Simple Gifts” (Shaker hymn in public domain)
- “Somewhere in France is the Lily” (World War I song composed in 1918 by Joseph E. Howard with lyrics written by Philander Chase Johnson. The lyrics and cover art are in the public domain)

COSTUMES

ALL CHARACTERS – (Except Nurses) A dress and shoes fitting of their character, their age, and the time period (1917-1918).

NURSES – Simple black and white attire fitting of the time period.

MARY – A lovely dress before going to war; on her return from war, she wears a simple coat.

ELSIE – A worn dress fitting of the time period with an apron signifying her housework.

VIRGINIA – A simple dress signifying the time period.

CLAIRE – a coat in the dormitory and a nursing uniform.

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

Somewhere in France is a Lily premiered at the Tom King Theatre of the Atlanta Girls' School (Barbara Uterhardt, Performing Arts Director) in Atlanta, GA. It was directed by Barbara Uterhardt with the following cast:

LILY.....	Josie Schoenberg
ELSIE.....	Kelsey Hames
VIRGINIA.....	Katherine Langford
SARAH.....	Arie Terrell
DENISE.....	Flora Smith
CLAIRE.....	Sophie Pettit
OLIVIA.....	Clare Coffman
KATE.....	Grace Adams Ward
AGATHA.....	Abby Bean
MARY.....	Molli Shuker

ENSEMBLE: Ali Gospodinov, Maggie Jones, Rebekka Long, and Lucy Shuker

Assistant Director: Erin Laurens

Costume Designer: Jane Kroessig

Set Designer and Set Production: Production Design Class (Audrey Cole, Parker Diaz, Kelsey Hames, Erin Laurens, Mahima Rameswar, Carter Sessions, and Emily Toma-Harrod)

DEDICATION

*This play is dedicated to my best friend and sister
Carrie Freeman, R.N.*

DO NOT COPY

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

SETTING: *Spring, 1917.*

AT RISE: *Lights up on LILY sitting at a kitchen table reading a textbook. The daily paper is lying on the table next to her. ELSIE is sweeping the floor. LILY slowly puts down her textbook and picks up the newspaper; she quietly opens it and begins reading. Soon she is engrossed. ELSIE, without stopping her chore, takes the newspaper from LILY'S hands and puts it into the waste bin in one fluid motion.*

LILY: Mama, I was reading that.

LILY goes for the waste bin to fish out the paper; ELSIE stops her.

ELSIE: Do your homework. There's no need for you to read that, especially not a few hours before bed. All it'll do is upset you.

LILY: How else am I going to know what's goin' on over there?

ELSIE: Don't you girls talk at school?

LILY: Yeah, but they're not as interested in it as I am. Mr. Hitchens gives us updates. His son is being sent to the front. So, he talks about it sometimes. The other girls just talk about their hair and boys.

ELSIE: Yes?

LILY: They don't even realize that, soon, their boys are going to be living in trenches, Mama. These trenches they've dug into the ground. They fight from there and... sometimes they get bombarded with shells and explosives. At least that's what Mr. Hitchens tells us.

ELSIE: I'm not so sure I like Mr. Hitchens telling you all of that.

VIRGINIA enters carrying a letter in one hand and a duffel bag in the other. She settles down at the kitchen table

ELSIE: Hello, Virginia, dear. How was your day?

VIRGINIA: Sorry I'm late. Mrs. Peters wanted to talk to me about her cat again.

LILY: What's the matter with Mrs. Peters' cat?

VIRGINIA: Oh, he's up a tree... again. She saw me walking on my way home from work and just wanted me to get him down.

ELSIE: *(Pausing in her sweeping.)* I saved you a plate. Kept it warm. *(Retrieves VIRGINIA a plate of food out of the oven.)* How's the cat?

VIRGINIA: It's out of the tree, though I'm sure it'll be back up in the tree again tomorrow when I'm coming home. *(Noticing the newspaper in the trash bin and fishing it out.)* What's the news today?

ELSIE: Oh, Virginia, please don't. Not at the table, dear.

VIRGINIA: I just want to see what's going on in the world, Elsie.

ELSIE: *(Irritated, sweeping again.)* You know what's going on in the world.

VIRGINIA: Haven't heard a lot lately, but... I know I couldn't very well live alone now that John's left for the front.

ELSIE: Well, you could've, but... it wouldn't have been very popular in town. You know, if those Krauts just hadn't sank that Lusitania ship...

LILY: Mother? Krauts? Really? Mrs. Peters' family was German, you know.

ELSIE: Yes, dear. Not after they moved here. They're Americans now.

VIRGINIA: *(Engrossed in the paper.)* Looks like John will be joining everyone else on the front lines.

LILY: They're fighting in trenches!

VIRGINIA: Yes, dear. I know. It's ridiculous. And do you know why?! It's because we're using Civil War tactics. This is a modern war. That's why so many soldiers are being mowed down.

ELSIE: *(Scolding her.)* Oh, Virginia!

VIRGINIA: Well, they've been at it over there since 1914 for goodness' sakes! You'd think they'd find a better approach.

ELSIE: Shame the generals haven't asked you what to do.

VIRGINIA: Yes, it is. It IS a shame. I could've won the war for them by now. And there's no use in shielding Lily from any of this, either. She knows what's going on, don't you?

LILY: If mother would ever let me finish the paper.

ELSIE: Don't you start in, too. The two of you together, I swear. I haven't got a chance.

LILY: Mr. Hitchens says the Krauts— (*Correcting herself.*) the Germans have those Gatling guns and they fire round after round. It takes down every soldier that charges.

VIRGINIA: Your Mr. Hitchens sounds like a smart man.

ELSIE: He sounds like an inappropriate man to me.

VIRGINIA: Please, Elz. Men younger than Lily are enlisting. And... they're using an outdated form of fighting if you ask me. Our tactics haven't caught up with the technology yet, and... (*Noticing that LILY is eying the letter on the table.*) You're right, Elz. We should change the subject. (*Hands the letter to LILY.*) This was in the mail when I came home.

ELSIE: Is it from Henry?

VIRGINIA: I imagine it is. Don't know who else would be writing Lily from overseas.

LILY: May I open it?

VIRGINIA: Well, it isn't addressed to me, so...

LILY: (*Holding the letter expectantly in her hands.*) What if he's hurt? What if he's angry with me because I wouldn't marry him before he left?

VIRGINIA: (*Instigating.*) You mean, because your mean old mother wouldn't let you marry him?

ELSIE: Yes, and you're still too young. I stand by my decision. Besides, if your father was still alive, he'd side with me. And if Henry were angry with you, Lily, do you think he'd be writing? I was right to turn him down for you. So much could happen between now and... whenever this is over.

LILY: I should've gone with him.

VIRGINIA: Gone with him where? Into a trench? They don't allow us to fight, silly. And did you see me going over there with John?

ELSIE: Oh, John wouldn't have you in a trench. He wouldn't be able to focus. You talk too much.

VIRGINIA: Oh, I miss talking with John. (*Clearly, she means something else other than "focus."*) And really miss helping him focus.

ELSIE: (*To VIRGINIA.*) Oh, I'll bet you do. (*To LILY.*) There's no way you could've gone with Henry, sweetheart.

LILY: I could. I could still go. I could be a nurse!

ELSIE: We're not talking about this again.

LILY: Yes, but you KNOW I could be.

ELSIE: I KNOW that you're still in school.

LILY: Yes, but I'm graduating soon.

ELSIE: And I seem to recall getting something in the mail about that, little girl. No need to remind me. And I also seem to remember a graduation party that I've been planning.

VIRGINIA: Yes, your mother's been working very hard at this party planning.

LILY: Are the two of you trying to change the subject again?

VIRGINIA: (*Knowingly.*) Why, no, of course not.

ELSIE: I just know that there are other subjects we like... and that are more fun. Like graduation parties. Have you decided what kind of cake you want?

LILY: Chocolate. (*Pause.*) Don't you think I could be a nurse?

ELSIE: Of course, you could. (*Pause.*) Do you think I should decorate with the pink tablecloth or the yellow?

LILY: Yellow. And, Mother, Papa was a doctor. Taking care of the sick runs in my blood.

VIRGINIA: Your mother's blood is going to be running high in a moment if you don't stop talking about this.

LILY: But I'd make a great nurse just like the two of you take care of me. And you take care of the women at church. Mama, you cook for people when they're sick. And Papa cured so many people in this town. A lot of them are alive because of him. I could do that.

ELSIE: I don't think being a nurse on the front lines is quite the same thing as being a small town doctor, dear. (*Pause.*) What dress do you think you'll wear?

LILY: The white one you made me. Don't you two think I'm patient and kind and smart and...?

ELSIE: Yes, sweet girl, you are all of those things.

VIRGINIA: And your mother is very proud of you. You're a very good student and a very good and smart girl, but maybe we should talk about the party?

LILY: I don't want to talk about the party. I want to talk about being a nurse. I want to talk about my future.

ELSIE: The party is your future, dear. And it's difficult for me to imagine my little girl over there when she can't even remember to do the dishes when I ask her to do them.

LILY: (*Teasingly.*) I don't think doing the dishes is quite the same thing as being a nurse on the front lines.

ELSIE: Fair enough. (*Pause. Watches LILY turn the letter over nervously in her hands.*) Do you want one of us to read the letter?

LILY: (*Relieved.*) Oh, yes. Would you? Ginny?

LILY hands VIRGINIA the letter. ELSIE joins them at the table. VIRGINIA carefully, thoughtfully tears into it.

VIRGINIA: (*To LILY.*) Take a breath. (*LILY and ELSIE both take a deep breath.*) All right. (*VIRGINIA reads the letter aloud complete with her own commentary in italics.*)

Dear Lily,

Just a few lines to let you know I'm alive. *See? He's alive. That's good news.* We stormed some German trenches a week ago and I was wounded, but I'm better now. *Not to worry. He's better.* The nurses took care of me and I've been sent back to the front. *Oh, dear. Don't encourage her, Henry. Let's see what else he has to say, huh?* The post is very bad and sometimes we don't get letters for two or three days. *See? This is exactly why John told me not to write. Clogs up the post.* It sure would help me if you would write. *Well, each to his own.* I know we didn't part on the best of terms, but I still think of you. *Ah, he's not angry with you. See?* It rains a lot here, but the ground dries quickly and it gets dusty again. At night, the sky is lit up with shells blazing. If the Germans weren't trying to kill us and the noise wasn't so loud, I might think it was a pretty sight. I hope that you are working hard at school, not reading the news or worrying. *And I think Henry has a good idea there.*

Take good care of yourself.

Please, write soon.

Yours, Henry

VIRGINIA pauses. They all take a moment, looking at the letter.

VIRGINIA: Well, he's alive.

LILY: Yes.

ELSIE: Isn't that what you wanted to know? Aren't you relieved?

LILY: Not exactly.

VIRGINIA: I know what'll make you feel better. He asked that you write to him. I think that's a splendid idea! Why don't you go upstairs, get your stationary, sit down at your desk and write to him? Right now. It would make you feel better and I'm certain he would like a letter from you.

ELSIE: In times like these, this is what we have to settle for - any blessings. He's alive. Take heart in that.

LILY: Yes, but he's there and I'm... here. (*Gestures to her book in front of her.*) Doing nothing, but reading about history.

ELSIE: You're finishing school. That's important.

LILY: I'm not saying I don't need to finish school. I only have two more weeks. But I am saying... I'm sick of reading about history. This is our history. (*Takes Henry's letter from ELSIE'S hands and walks around the kitchen, grasping it.*) Don't you realize, we are making history? Our country's history is happening over there just as we sit at this table. And here we are, talking about things, not doing things while Henry... and John... are off fighting for our country. It's not enough for me to talk about things. You both know it's not enough for me.

ELSIE: You can't possibly think we'd just let you just go off to some other country and...

LILY: You don't have to let me, Mother. That's just it. I'll be 18 next week... and I know exactly what I want to do after my birthday! I'm joining the U.S. Army and I'm going to train to become a nurse.

ELSIE: That's not what I want for you. That's not what your father would've wanted for you.

VIRGINIA: I was rather thinking you'd become a teacher, you like history so much. Something a little less dangerous. Though, goodness knows, students can be unruly sometimes.

LILY: But I don't want to teach, Ginny. I want to help. They won't let us fight, but they will let us be nurses. And I want to be a nurse.

ELSIE: You are so stubborn.

LILY: Yes, I know.

VIRGINIA: And headstrong.

LILY: Always have been, Ginny.

ELSIE: And... brave.

LILY: Like you, Mother.

ELSIE: And... sometimes your bravery scares me.

LILY: Yes, Mother. I know.

ELSIE: Oh, well, then, you just know everything, don't you?

LILY: I learned everything from you.

ELSIE: Oh, no, you didn't. You didn't learn stubbornness from me.

That was from your father. And probably Ginny, too.

VIRGINIA: Oh, don't bring me into this, Elz.

ELISE: Oh, all right. But her father taught her that! The caregiving she may have gotten from me, but that stubbornness she definitely got from her father. *(Beat.)* What'll we do? What are we supposed to do here if you leave?

LILY: You'll both carry on without me. Like you said, I can't even remember to wash the dishes when you tell me.

VIRGINIA: I bet if you stayed, you could get better at that.

LILY: Oh, Ginny. I can't stay. I can't stay put.

VIRGINIA: And what makes you think she'll let you go?

LILY: Because she doesn't have a say after next week.

ELSIE: How dare you speak to me like that!

VIRGINIA: No, no. Don't yell at her. We're not going to yell. It won't help. She's right. You know she's right. This world is certainly not the one we grew up in, Elz. And it's not what you'd hoped for her, but...

LILY: A great many things are not what we'd hoped, Ginny.

ELSIE: It's so dangerous, Lily. And you don't have a say in where they send you. Do you know that?

LILY: Henry didn't have a say, did he? John didn't have a say. I'll go where they tell me to go.

ELSIE: You'll have no choice. They don't give you a choice. Once you're in, you're in. There's no quitting or coming home. It's not like when you took piano lessons. *(Pause.)* Are you quite sure this is what you want to do?

LILY: Yes, I'm sure.

ELSIE: Go on, then! Go! Fine! Leave us here with... with dirty dishes and... *(Starts to cry.)*

LILY: *(Comforting ELSIE.)* Oh, Mother, don't cry. Please, don't cry. *(Pause.)* Ginny can do the dishes.

VIRGINIA: I see how it is. We're just gonna leave ole Cousin Virginia here with all the chores. Sure. I don't mind. Don't mind a bit.

They all giggle and the tension breaks just a little.

ELSIE: *(Hopeful, as though she's had an epiphany.)* You could quilt!
You could volunteer at the local hospital!

ELSIE and VIRGINIA look at LILY and LILY just shakes her head.

VIRGINIA: I always thought it would be our family here against the world.

LILY: It is us against the world, Ginny. It's all of US against the world. But for me? I just think... no, no. I just know my place is over there. I have to do this. Do you understand?

ELSIE: *(Drying her tears.)* I understand. I understand that you're going to do this no matter how we feel about it. I'm just worried is all. You're my little girl.

LILY: I'm not little.

ELSIE: You are to me. And this war is... big. And I just don't want it to swallow you up. *(Cups LILY's cheek in her hand.)* You just promise us you'll stay alive.

LILY: *(Taking their hands in hers.)* I promise.

VIRGINIA: Alright, then. Enough melodrama. How about we try and just enjoy these last few weeks before graduation, huh? Before you set off on your big adventure? And let me finish the paper?

LILY: Certainly.

ELISE: We can try for a little... normalcy.

LILY: *(Returning to her history book.)* Sounds wonderful.

VIRGINIA: You can help your mother finish planning your party.

LILY: Absolutely.

ELSIE: You could start doing the dishes more often for me.

LILY: *(Half paying attention.)* Yes.

VIRGINIA: And your mother can talk you out of going.

LILY: I'd like that very much. *(ELSIE moves to get the milk from the ice box, but LILY stops her.)* Wait, what? No, no.

VIRGINIA: Just seeing if you were listening.

ELSIE: Do you two want some milk before bed?

LILY: Yes, let's do that.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2
REGISTRATION

SETTING: *Office or waiting room. There's a sign that reads: "Nurse Registration."*

AT RISE: *Lights up on DENISE who is sitting behind a desk, taking care of paperwork as SARAH stands in line. ENSEMBLE GIRLS stand in line or sit on a bench filling out forms. LILY enters. After first looking around to assure herself she's in the correct room, she hesitantly gets in line.*

SARAH: Is this your first time here?

LILY: First time?

SARAH: Yeah. Not everyone gets in on their first try. There's a written exam before training. Sometimes girls pass the exam, but then don't pass the training course.

LILY: Oh, what's the exam like?

SARAH: Did you graduate from high school?

LILY: Yes, I graduate next Friday.

SARAH: Good. You should be fine, then.

LILY: Well, what's training? Is it hard?

SARAH: I'm not sure. I haven't done it yet. My friend, Shelley, told me it was easy. She's over there now. She writes me every few weeks. Oh, I didn't even introduce myself. My name's Sarah!

SARAH gingerly extends her hand. LILY cautiously takes it and SARAH shakes it vigorously, shaking all of LILY in the process.

LILY: I'm Lily.

SARAH: Good to meet you, Lily! (*LILY retrieves her hand and smiles at SARAH.*) What made you want to do this?

LILY: Uh, my boyfriend, Henry... well – my former boyfriend – was drafted a few months ago.

SARAH: Followin' a fella, huh? Yeah, a lot ah girls do that.

LILY: No, no, that's not really... I just... he writes me and I hear what's going on over there and I just feel... (*Fumbles to find the right words.*)

SARAH: ...Left out of the action?

LILY: Exactly, yes! My mother wasn't so sure. She wants me to stay home with her and make quilts and care baskets for the soldiers, but that's just...

SARAH: Yup. Not enough. Good girl. Good for you. There needs to be more of us over there, taking care of 'em. It's about time they let us pick up a gun and fight, too, if ya ask me.

LILY: Oh, I'm not sure I'd be ready for that, not sure I could do that... even if they let me.

SARAH: Oh, I bet we could. I really bet we could. My father taught me how to shoot a pistol. Bet a rifle isn't much different.

LILY: Oh, yeah? Well, why do you wanna join?

SARAH: Because it's what I **can** do. It's what I hope they'll let me do. I'm sure not staying home, quiltin'. Oh, not that there's anything wrong with that. I just don't want to be... *(Fumbles for the right words.)*

LILY: Left out of the action?

SARAH: Exactly, yes!

The line has dwindled down now and SARAH stands at the desk. DENISE looks at her disapprovingly.

DENISE: C'mon, Sarah. This is your third time here this week.

SARAH: Third time's a charm, Denise.

DENISE: Now, look...

SARAH: Just... give me the registration form, Denise.

DENISE: You know I can't do that.

SARAH: You could if you wanted to...

DENISE: It's not that I don't want to...

SARAH: Then, give it to me.

DENISE: I can't.

SARAH: Why not?

DENISE: You know why not.

SARAH: Yeah, but I wanna hear you say it. Say it, Denise. Why can't you give me the form, huh?

DENISE: *(More forcefully.)* You know why not.

SARAH: Yeah, I know why not. But say it. I want to hear you say it out loud so everyone hears.

DENISE: This is ridiculous.

SARAH: Yes, it is. You're absolutely right. It is ridiculous.

DENISE: Everyone knows why you can't register. Even you know why you can't register.

SARAH: Oh, I think everyone knows why. I'm just not sure they can admit it.

DENISE: (*Desperate to keep the peace.*) Maybe not. Just... just go. Please. I don't want any trouble. It's already been a long day, Sarah. C'mon.

SARAH: Well, I wouldn't wanna cause any trouble, Denise. (*DENISE looks at her, imploringly.*) Alright, alright. I'll go. I'm goin'. (*SARAH turns to LILY.*) See, kid? They won't let just anyone do this. Even if you want it. Even if it is all you want. (*Pause.*) Good luck over there. (*Hesitates. Then, she finally begins to exit. Just as she reaches for the door...*) Bye, Denise. See ya again tomorrow!

DENISE stands indignantly as SARAH exits and LILY watches her. Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3
LAST DAY OF CLASS

SETTING: *A classroom with desks, a blackboard and a wall piano.*

AT RISE: *LILY, KAREN, LAURA and AMY enter the room, chattering excitedly.*

KAREN: Well, are you sure you want to do that? I mean, you don't even know where they'll send you.

LILY: Oh, yes. I already signed up for training. I leave tomorrow. What are you doing after graduation?

KAREN: Randall proposed.

LILY: He did!? And what does your mother say?

KAREN: She says that I'm 18 now and Randall's 19. They're shipping him off in July, so it'll be a quick wedding. Nothing too fancy.

LAURA: I'm helping her make her dress. It's white lace. It's going to be beautiful.

AMY: Aren't you and Henry getting married, Lily?

LILY: Oh, no. He asked, but... my mother said I'm too young. He's on the front now.

AMY: Didn't he give you a ring before he left?

LILY: He wanted to give me one... but... enough about me! What are you doing after graduation?

AMY: Oh, I'm going to New York. My uncle runs a theater there and he says with my voice, I have a chance at being an actress.

LILY: And your mother's alright with that?

AMY: Oh, I haven't exactly told my mother yet. I packed my suitcase and hid it under my bed. I figure... I'm young and it's now or never. Besides, I'll be 18 in July and she won't be able to say no, at least not legally.

LILY: That's very courageous.

LAURA: I'm going to college and my mother says that's courageous! *(All the other girls turn to LAURA.)* I got a full scholarship. I'm going to become an English teacher!

KAREN: Oh, be sure you tell Lily not to worry. I'm certain your mother said that would be alright.

LAURA: Oh, my mother is ecstatic.

LILY: My mother is not... *(The other girls turn their attention to LILY.)* My mother is not alright. No, she is not at all alright. She didn't think I would actually sign up. Didn't think I would actually become a nurse.

LAURA: Oh, I'm sure...

MRS. THOMPSON enters the classroom.

MRS. THOMPSON: *(Hurriedly.)* Alright, girls! We should get started right away. *(She sits at the piano.)* The presentation is in an hour. Please take out your music.

The girls begin to take out their music books.

LAURA: What I was saying is... I'm sure your mother will be proud of you when it's all said and done. I think... I think you're very brave.

KAREN: *(Distantly.)* I... never thought I'd get married this young.

LILY: Oh, I'm sure you two will be happy together. You've both known each other all your life. I don't think anyone else is more fit for each other.

MRS. THOMPSON: What are you girls on about?

KAREN: Oh, I'm getting married to Randall this July. He's being shipped off soon, so... it won't be too fancy a wedding...

KAREN breaks down. MRS. THOMPSON goes to comfort her. Then, MRS. THOMPSON begins to breakdown, too. It becomes almost comical as all the girls begin to weep.

LAURA: Oh, why are you crying, Mrs. Thompson?

MRS. THOMPSON: (*Wiping her eyes with a rag and handing it to KAREN.*) Because there are some huge changes coming for you girls and a lot more changes coming for your beaus, I'm afraid. I never wanted to teach you and, then, send you all out into a world this chaotic. Change is difficult, not just for you young ones, but for us teachers, too. It used to be that you all would stay around home, but... with cars and new train routes and... this awful war, you're all being taken away from here.

KAREN: Well, I'll still be here, Mrs. Thompson. I'm only getting married; I'm not leaving.

LILY: And we'll all be back.

AMY: Speak for yourself. I hope to become famous one day.

This breaks the tension and they all laugh. MRS. THOMPSON refocuses them.

MRS. THOMPSON: Alright, girls. Where were we? Oh, yes. Our presentation is in an hour, so let's prepare. You'll all begin singing as you enter in a straight line and you'll stand in front of the stage. Now, are you all ready?

The girls stand up, holding their music books in hand. MRS THOMPSON begins to play the piano. She plays "Simple Gifts." The girls begin to sing.

LILY, KAREN, AMY, LAURA and ENSEMBLE STUDENTS:

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.*

Lights slowly fade out as the girls sing.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4
LILY'S MONOLOGUE

AT START: *Lights up on LILY sitting at a desk, writing.*

LILY:

Dear Mother and Ginny,
I had no idea I would be younger than most nurses in training, but I am. Here I am, six months later, only 18 – the youngest among the trainees. I'm doing well, though. I think you'd be proud.

It seems I work well under pressure and they tell me that's very important over there. Can you believe we don't even have any military rankings? We certainly aren't trained as soldiers, but we are part of the Army. It's strange. As the war continues, we're badly needed on the front lines. So, that's where they're sending me. You would've thought – because of the great need for nurses – they'd have wanted everyone who was able to become a nurse to be a nurse. But on the day I joined and since I've started training, I've seen some women turned away for different reasons. I don't agree with those reasons, but... no one asked me what I think.

Since training started, I've taken up drinking coffee. Black, like father used to drink it. Remember that, how he always drank coffee before going out to check on patients? It always kept father going and it'll keep me going. I'm very excited to meet my fellow nurses. I

arrive next week, they tell me. I'll be working alongside British nurses at a camp hospital in France. They've been notified that I'll be stationed with them. I'll bet they're as excited to meet me as I am to meet them.

I hope you're both well. I miss you.
Give my regards to the ladies at church.
Yours, Lily

*LILY puts down her pen and looks out at the audience, expectantly.
Lights out.*

ACT ONE, SCENE 5
NURSES' DORMITORY

SETTING: *Dormitory. The room is simple with one empty chest of drawers. All other furniture is suggested. There is a gramophone sitting in a corner.*

AT RISE: *KATE, OLIVIA and CLAIRE hustle about preparing for the day.*

CLAIRE: I hear she's an American. Well, I certainly hope she knows we don't have the time for her to get acclimated here.

OLIVIA: Don't be so crass, Claire. She's already been through training. It's not as though she's coming here off the streets, unprepared.

KATE: *(Messing with her hair.)* Does anyone have an extra hairpin? I seem to have dropped one and... it's just a mess. Oh, Claire, look!

CLAIRE: Oh, all right. Let me do it. *(Helping KATE fix her hair.)* See? We already have quite enough to take care of here without helping a new girl.

KATE: Well, if you didn't want to help me, you could just say so.

OLIVIA: It's not as though we can't use the help with some of our nurses being rushed off to the hospitals.

CLAIRE: Oh, be still, Kate.

CLAIRE steadies hairpins in her mouth as she works to put up KATE's hair. AGATHA enters with a very shy LILY holding her suitcase. AGATHA and LILY stand in the doorway as CLAIRE continues to rattle on with hairpins poised in her teeth, like a mother putting up a daughter's hair; CLAIRE's back remains to the doorway so she doesn't notice LILY and AGATHA enter.

CLAIRE: I'm aware we need help. But does it have to be an American nurse? She's not even fully trained. They've become so lax in their training there because of the need here and, besides... I detest Americans. Took them long enough to get involved with the war effort. Their soldiers are good looking enough, but they're ever so... forward. They don't take tea; they don't even know how to take tea. They're bold, rude. And they smell. They always wear too much perfume. I just hope Agatha knows I'm not helping to tidy up this little mess. And that's exactly what she's going to be, a little mess. You mark my words. (*Emphasizing each word.*) A little mess.

OLIVIA: (*Uncomfortable, trying to stop CLAIRE from talking.*) Claire?

CLAIRE: It's true, Liv. All true. This girl didn't get here by her own merits like the rest of us. She got here because of who her daddy is...or was. I hear tell he was a doctor and he died of cancer and they all knew him where she trained. She's not even of good stock. Cancer! It runs in her family. So? That means she has a weak constitution. That's what we're in for. Weakness and probably laziness as well.

OLIVIA: (*Scolding.*) Claire?

KATE: Ouch, Claire! You're pulling.

CLAIRE: *(To KATE.)* Oh, do stop fidgeting, Kate. *(To OLIVIA.)* You never let me finish a thought, Liv. The only reason – and I do mean the **only** reason – she’s being allowed here with the rest of us is because the U.S. Army has gotten involved at the last minute and somehow Agatha thought it would be a good idea to let American nurses work alongside us. We’re doing fine without them if you ask me.

AGATHA: *(Interrupting CLAIRE.)* Now here she is, girls! *(CLAIRE and KATE freeze.)* I take it you’re quite finished, Claire?

CLAIRE: Yes. Of course, Mrs. Agatha. I was only just finishing Kate’s hair. You know how I like to help the other girls.

AGATHA: Oh, yes. Quite. And we all appreciate your help, I’m sure.

All the girls – except for CLAIRE - turn to look at LILY. OLIVIA and KATE rush to greet her, like she’s a new curiosity.

OLIVIA: Hello, I’m Olivia, but you may call me Liv. Did you have a safe voyage? *(Taking her suitcase.)* May I help you unpack?

KATE: *(Excitedly.)* What was the ship like? Did you get seasick? I think I would get seasick if I were on a ship. Do you miss your mother? Oh, I do. I miss my mother terribly. My name’s “Kate”, by the way. And you’re... well, you’re just lovely. I like your dress. Did you make it? I make my own clothes. Well, I don’t make them exactly. I mend my own clothes and...

AGATHA: *(Interrupting KATE.)* Yes, thank you, Kate. Let’s give Lily some room to breathe, please. And why don’t we take a breath ourselves, hum? *(To LILY.)* Would you like me to help you unpack, dear?

OLIVIA and KATE: *(Overlapping.)* No, let us do it! Oh, please, yes. We want to help!

CLAIRE has been standing silently in place, fumbling with things on her bedside table. She hasn’t even looked up to see LILY. AGATHA glances over OLIVIA and KATE to CLAIRE. AGATHA crosses to her.

AGATHA: Or maybe Claire would like to help? *(CLAIRE looks down at her knick-knacks, ashamed.)* Claire? Do come and meet Lily, please?

AGATHA takes CLAIRE by the hand and gently leads her to LILY, who is still standing in the doorway. CLAIRE and LILY look at each other awkwardly.

LILY: *(Extending her hand.)* Pleased to meet you, Claire. I'm Lily.

CLAIRE: *(Barely making eye contact, but returning the handshake.)*
Charmed, I'm sure.

AGATHA: I'll leave you girls to help Lily get unpacked. *(To LILY.)* Your bed is at the end of the row, dear. You'll find all you need as well as your own bedside table for any photos from home or personal items. There's a chapel downstairs that's open at any time if you feel the need to pray. For now, though, please get unpacked and get into your uniform as we're needed and your shifts begin soon at hospital. *(Looking to OLIVIA and KATE.)* Come now, girls. Let's leave Claire and Lily to get acquainted and get things situated. *(Leading OLIVIA and KATE out of the room and looking to CLAIRE.)* I take it you'll help Lily feel welcome, Claire.

AGATHA, OLIVIA and KATE exit the room. CLAIRE and LILY are left, staring at each other. After a beat, they both move to the chest of drawers.

LILY: It was a heart attack.

CLAIRE: What?

LILY: My father died of a heart attack, not cancer. It wasn't expected.

CLAIRE: Oh. Well, you'll find most of us here have lost someone. Death is very common. This **is** a war zone. *(CLAIRE notices the pained look on LILY's face.)* I'm sorry for your loss.

LILY: Thank you. Have you lost someone?

CLAIRE: That's absolutely none of your business and I'll thank you to keep to yourself. *(CLAIRE puts the suitcase on the floor.)* Now, do you want me to help you unpack?

LILY: Oh, I can do it.

CLAIRE: Oh, nonsense. Let me. *(CLAIRE opens the suitcase as LILY tries to stop her. CLAIRE pauses.)* Well, what do we have here?

CLAIRE pulls out a bottle of perfume.

LILY: It's my mother's. She gave it to me for graduation.

CLAIRE: *(Disapprovingly.)* Lovely.

LILY: I can do the rest.

CLAIRE: I'm certain you can. *(CLAIRE begins emptying the suitcase's contents.)* And we'd better hurry, too, or you'll make us all late.

LILY: I can fold these myself.

CLAIRE and LILY reach for the same shirt in the newly formed pile of clothes. They have a tug-o-war with it.

CLAIRE: Let me help.

LILY: I don't really need your help, thank you.

CLAIRE: You have no idea what you're doing.

LILY: Maybe, but I can certainly figure it out myself.

CLAIRE: *(Throwing the shirt at LILY.)* All right, then. Figure it out on your own! *(She dumps the contents of the suitcase onto the floor.)* Here. Sort it all out yourself! *(CLAIRE turns to leave. LILY stares at the pile of clothes. From the doorway, CLAIRE turns to get in the last word.)* You're going to find that chapel very useful. You'll need a lot of prayer. *(Pause.)* Don't make us late.

CLAIRE slams the door behind her. LILY begins to pick up the clothes and fold them. Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 6
LETTER FROM VIRGINIA

SETTING: *The kitchen.*

AT RISE: *VIRGINIA sits at the kitchen table composing a letter to LILY. ELSIE stands at the counter, occasionally interrupting her with thoughts.*

VIRGINIA: *(Dictating her letter out loud to herself.)*

Dear Lily,

'We're sending you some records from my store. In your last letter you mentioned one of your roommates had a gramophone? Luckily, I found some records I think you'll like.

ELSIE: (*Looking over VIRGINIA's shoulder.*) Tell her about our new garden!

VIRGINIA: She's not wanting to hear about our garden, Elz.

ELSIE: Just tell her.

VIRGINIA: (*Continuing to dictate out loud.*) Also, your mother wants me to tell you we've planted a new garden in the backyard. We have peas, tomatoes, corn and - your favorite - squash.

ELSIE: She hates squash, Ginny.

VIRGINIA: (*Looking up at ELSIE.*) Yes, I know. I was making a joke. She'll think it's funny.

ELSIE: What if she doesn't get it?

VIRGINIA: She'll get it.

ELSIE: I didn't get it.

VIRGINIA: She'll get it. Do you want to write the letter?

ELSIE: I'm doing dishes.

VIRGINIA: That's what I thought. (*Continues to dictate the letter out loud.*) We've been making quilts for the hospital. We're sending one to you as well. I hope it keeps you warm at night.

ELSIE: Tell her we both made it.

VIRGINIA: (*Dictating out loud.*) Your mother tells me to tell you that we both made it.

ELSIE: Tell her we hope she's well.

VIRGINIA: (*Out loud.*) We hope you're doing well.

ELSIE: Tell her we love her.

VIRGINIA cuts a look at ELSIE. ELSIE goes back to drying her dish.

VIRGINIA: (*Out loud.*) We love you. Love, Virginia

ELSIE: And Mama.

VIRGINIA: (*Out loud.*) And Mama.

They both look at the letter approvingly. Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 7
MARY THE CANARY

SETTING: *Nurses' dormitory.*

AT RISE: *OLIVIA and KATE dance around the room as the gramophone plays a new record. LILY reads over the letter from VIRGINIA. CLAIRE sits quietly, reading a book.*

LILY: Oh, I'm so glad Ginny sent me these new records. Oh, and listen to this! They've planted squash.

LILY giggles and CLAIRE looks up from her book.

CLAIRE: What's so funny about squash?

LILY: Oh, I hate it. Ginny knows that. *(Pause. CLAIRE looks confused. LILY looks back to the letter.)* She knew it'd make me laugh. *(LILY looks over the quilt from her gift box.)* Oh, and look! They also both made this quilt. Isn't it wonderful?

KATE: Your Cousin Ginny sounds wonderful!

OLIVIA: We were getting so tired of the old records.

CLAIRE: Yes, if I had to hear "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" one more time...

KATE: Oh, but I still like that one!

KATE begins to sing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." CLAIRE stops her.

CLAIRE: Yes, yes, Kate. We all remember it. Why don't you teach us a waltz, then?

KATE: Well, all right, but when will any of us have a chance to waltz with anyone?

OLIVIA: I don't know, but Lily seemed pretty cozy with that soldier today. Maybe they'll be waltzing soon?

LILY: Did you see the look on his face? When I told him I'd go for a walk with him once he starts walking again?

KATE: I've never seen a soldier's face light up so bright.

OLIVIA: Or turn so red. I think he blushed deeper than the red on my coat.

KATE: It really was clever of you. Bet he'll be walking again by tomorrow.

CLAIRE: Maybe. Maybe not.

LILY: *(With muted hope.)* We'll see.

OLIVIA: I don't know, but Lily seemed pretty cozy with that soldier today. Maybe they'll be waltzing soon?

LILY: Did you see the look on his face? When I told him I'd go for a walk with him once he starts walking again?

KATE: I've never seen a soldier's face light up so bright.

OLIVIA: Or turn so red. I think he blushed deeper than the red on my coat.

KATE: It really was clever of you. Bet he'll be walking again by tomorrow.

CLAIRE: Maybe. Maybe not.

LILY: *(With muted hope.)* We'll see.

CLAIRE: You shouldn't promise things like that to them, Lily.

LILY: I don't know what you mean.

CLAIRE: Oh, don't you? You should never make promises you can't keep. You know you don't plan on following through with him. Not when you're engaged to another man. It's indecent.

LILY: Henry and I are hardly engaged.

CLAIRE: He wrote you that letter, asking you, didn't he?

LILY: He asked if I would wait for him is all. That's hardly an engagement.

CLAIRE: And you agreed to wait, didn't you?

LILY: We've just been writing to each other when we can. And there's nothing wrong with going for a walk with a soldier. Anything to get them well again.

CLAIRE: Anything?

OLIVIA: Oh, both of you, stop it. We're all so tired with this back and forth, really.

KATE: Yes, I'm hungry!

CLAIRE: *(To KATE.)* Oh, you're always hungry. Or you're always something... for goodness sake. Hungry, tired, angry, weeping. Good grief. Pick a thing, Kate!

KATE: Well, right now I'm hungry. Aren't you all hungry?

OLIVIA: Yes, of course, but we should finish listening to all these new records. This is delightful!

LILY: Yes, we've been looking forward to listening to these records all day, Claire.

The girls continue dancing as AGATHA enters the room.

AGATHA: Oh, you're dancing is... quite lively, girls. But please stop dancing just for a moment. *(They all stop.)* And quiet the music, please.

CLAIRE: *(Stopping the gramophone.)* Oh, with pleasure.

AGATHA: As you girls remember, Olivia's sister, Mary, wrote me a few weeks ago asking for a position here. She wanted to volunteer and, as you know, we desperately need the help.

OLIVIA: Yes, but... you told me she isn't properly trained... and she...

AGATHA: Yes, I know what I said, but... you did tell me she worked at the munitions factory filling shells, so I figured she's capable. She'd made her own money. She wrote me and assured me she could buy her own passage here and that she's keen to empty bed pans and sweep up. And I know you girls can teach her to change the bandages.

OLIVIA: Are you saying... you'll let her come and help us?

AGATHA: Not exactly. I'm saying... I've brought you a present, Olivia. *(AGATHA clears the doorway.)* Come in, Mary!

MARY enters the room. She is wearing a lovely dress and has a suitcase, but her skin is clearly yellowed. OLIVIA squeals with excitement and runs to her sister, hugging her.

OLIVIA: *(Standing back and admiring her sister's dress.)* Oh, you're a lovely sight, Mary!

MARY: So are you! Oh, your face is a lovely sight.

OLIVIA, CLAIRE and KATE are clearly used to the sight of MARY's yellowed skin as Canary girls were common in London before they left for the front, but LILY stands back, shocked.

CLAIRE: *(Slightly under her breath, but AGATHA hears her.)* Yes, just lovely that we're going to have to train someone new. Just lovely.

AGATHA: *(Aside, to CLAIRE.)* Claire, stop it.

CLAIRE straightens up.

OLIVIA: Oh, I'm sure you remember the girls. I told you about them in my letters.

MARY: Of course. Hello, Claire and... Kate, is it? (*KATE nods and smiles. MARY notices LILY standing across the room. She crosses to her.*) And you must be the lovely Lily. (*MARY extends her hand, but LILY is hesitant.*) Oh, dear. Don't worry. It won't rub off. In fact, it won't even come off in the shower no matter how much I scrub. And I do scrub.

LILY smiles and shakes MARY's hand, but looks at her, concerned.

LILY: Yes, but what is it?

MARY: Oh, it's something we loaded the munitions shells with at the factory. It's called (*She carefully and, with uncertainty, pronounces the word.*) Trinitrotoluene... or TNT for short. It's yellow, so it turned us all yellow. But the doctors say there's no harm in it. It's just a side effect. Nothing to be concerned about. Back home, the men on the street could be rude about it, but they were jealous. Most of the other capable men have gone off to war, so we're there to pick up the slack; we were getting all the good jobs, you see...

CLAIRE: I'd hold off on calling this a good job until.

MARY: Oh, I'll be grateful to have it, Claire. I was getting rather tired of filling shells what with my husband... gone.

CLAIRE: (*Impatiently, changing the subject.*) Maybe we could discuss this over dinner?

MARY: Yes, of course! We should go before it gets too late.

ALL: (*Except MARY.*) Yes! Certainly! Of course.

They all prepare to leave.

AGATHA: Oh, wait, Lily. Before you go, I have something for you. I almost forgot. This letter just arrived for you today.

LILY takes the letter, excited.

LILY: But I just got all mother's letters the other day. Oh, this is wonderful!

All gather around LILY, expectant. LILY looks at them, crowding her.

AGATHA: Let's give Lily some privacy, ladies.

MARY: Yes, girls, why don't you all show me around?

OLIVIA: Lily, you'll be fine just meeting us later, then?

LILY: (*Focused on the letter.*) Yes, yes. Of course.

All but LILY exit the room, OLIVIA glancing back once. LILY takes time with the letter, looking it over like the rare, precious thing it is. She finally opens it, sits and begins reading. Here, ELSIE steps into light on the opposite side of the stage and begins to recite her letter. As LILY reads, she begins to cry. She doesn't notice CLAIRE enter the room. CLAIRE stands, watching LILY as she reads.

ELSIE:

Dear Lily,

I know I haven't written in two weeks since Ginny made me send you those records. I miss you, my girl, but I'm afraid I have some sad news. Henry's mother received a telegram from the front yesterday. He's been killed in action.

I know this news will be devastating to you. It's shaken us to our core, someone so close to home, so close to you, to us. I want you to come home right away. I know what you're doing there is important, but I want you home now. Please, come home, my darling girl.

I want you home, safe.

All my love,

Mother

LILY sobs. CLAIRE stands still for a while, as if she doesn't know what to do. She finally walks quietly to LILY's side. She awkwardly puts her hand on LILY's shoulder. LILY looks up, embarrassed.

LILY: *(Wiping away her tears.)* Oh, I'm sorry.

CLAIRE: *(Uncomfortable, but trying.)* Don't be sorry.

LILY: What are you doing here?

CLAIRE: I forgot my coat. *(Kneeling beside LILY.)* What does it say?

LILY: Oh, it's nothing. *(LILY is trying to keep a stiff upper lip, but CLAIRE is unconvinced.)* It's... it's Henry. He's... he's...

LILY breaks down, unable to finish her sentence. CLAIRE holds her, comforting her.

CLAIRE: You don't have to say it. You don't ever have to say it out loud if you don't want to. It's always hard the first time you lose someone. *(Pause.)* My first was my younger brother, William. 1915. He was such a handsome, young man. Had a fiancée, too. Oh, she was heartbroken, but... not as heartbroken as I was. Or my mother. My mother cried for days, wouldn't come out of her bedroom. A few months later, my husband, David, was killed on the front lines. Shrapnel went right through his heart. The nurses did the best they could, but they were understaffed and overrun with soldiers; the attack was sudden and they weren't ready for it. So...

LILY: Your husband? Oh, Claire, I had no idea.

CLAIRE: Of course you didn't. I don't talk about it. We have enough to deal with here.

LILY: I'm so sorry.

CLAIRE: *(A little curt.)* Oh, don't apologize. It doesn't help. *(Softening.)* Besides, it's why I became a nurse. I believe everything happens for a reason, even the horrible things. David's death made me want to help those at the front. This war has taken so much from so many of us... and I'm sorry it's taken your Henry.

LILY: *(Attempting CLAIRE's curt tone through her sadness.)* Don't apologize.

CLAIRE looks at LILY approvingly and they smile at each other.

CLAIRE: There you go. Chin up, girl. *(Pause. LILY begins to cry again.)* Oh, you did love him, didn't you?

LILY: I do... I did. But it's not just that. Oh, just read it.

LILY hands CLAIRE the letter and CLAIRE reads it.

CLAIRE: She wants you to come home? But... you can't...

LILY: I don't want to.

CLAIRE: Then, don't.

LILY: Oh, you don't even want me here.

CLAIRE: That's not true. I... I don't dislike you.

LILY: Well, you certainly have a funny way of showing it.

CLAIRE: It's just... over these last few weeks, you've proven yourself to be useful. (*Referring to the letter.*) And you certainly know what loss is like now. All of us girls have lost someone.

LILY: How come they never talk about it?

LILY looks to CLAIRE, waiting for answers.

CLAIRE: Olivia lost her brother. He died of mustard gas poisoning. And Kate lost two cousins and an uncle on the front lines.

LILY: (*Surprised.*) I had no idea.

CLAIRE: There's enough sickness and death here already, isn't there? Besides, we try and keep a stiff upper lip here, (*Softening.*) but... we're not made of stone. (*Pause.*) So, as I was saying, what are you going to do?

LILY: Well... my mother...?

CLAIRE: Yes, your mother. ALL our mothers. Do you think my mother likes me being a nurse on the front lines?

LILY: Hadn't thought of it.

CLAIRE: No, she most certainly does not. She lost her son, my only other sibling. Then, we lost my husband. I'm all she has now. She didn't want me to leave home. It's difficult for our parents. Our generation isn't only contending with the Hun, but we have a newfound freedom. We're nurses and trolley drivers and some of us work in munitions factories. Could you imagine our mothers... or our grandmothers doing this?

LILY: No, I suppose not.

CLAIRE: So... what are you going to do?

Pause.

LILY: *(Thoughtfully.)* I just don't know yet.

CLAIRE: That's all right. You don't have to know yet. Come now. The other girls are waiting for us. It'll be good for you to come out with us tonight. It'll clear your head and give you time to think. I'm sure you're hungry. And the girls won't hound you about this letter. I'll make sure of it.

LILY: All right.

CLAIRE: *(Helping LILY to her feet and wiping LILY's tears.)* Remember, darling, chin up. We have to keep a stiff upper lip here. *(CLAIRE gathers her coat and heads to the door. She turns and offers her arm to LILY. LILY slowly takes it.)* Ready?

LILY: Ready.

CLAIRE smiles at LILY. LILY slowly smiles back. LILY nods. They exit. Lights out.

INTERMISSION (Optional)

ACT TWO, SCENE 1
THE LETTERS

SETTING: *Four writing desks.*

AT RISE: *Lights up on LILY, CLAIRE, OLIVIA and KATE each sitting at writing desks with a pen and paper in hand. They write letters to their families - their dialogue sometimes overlaps.*

LILY: Dear Mother—

CLAIRE: Dear Mother—

OLIVIA: Dear Mother—

KATE: Dear Matthew—

LILY, CLAIRE, OLIVIA all stop and look at KATE.

KATE: What? You don't know everything about me.

The girls resume their letter writing.

LILY: I know this will disappoint you, but I'm not coming home.

CLAIRE: That girl I told you about? She's not going home.

OLIVIA: All is well here and the girls are getting along just fine.

KATE: Your last letter was just darling.

LILY: They need me here at the front.

CLAIRE: Would you believe I told her we need her here at the front?

LILY and CLAIRE: They/we are understaffed.

OLIVIA: Atmosphere was a little tense between Lily and Claire, but they're better now. It's been helpful having Lily here.

KATE: Thank you for the picture. You look so handsome.

CLAIRE: I miss home, of course, but trust you are well without me.

There are rumors the war will end soon. Though I don't make it a habit of wishing things into existence, I hope the rumors are true.

LILY: Though I am sad about Henry, his death has only stiffened my resolve. These soldiers need me. The war can't last much longer and as soon as it's done, I'll come home. I promise.

OLIVIA: I want so badly to come home. I find that the work here is wearing me thin.

KATE: I'm glad you got well here and Lily got you walking again. Though I'm glad I was the one to go walking with you. I was sorry they sent you back to the front. I miss you terribly. I miss our walks. Things are ever so boring here... except for the music.

CLAIRE: Lily's music has done wonders for our morale. We were ever so tired of "It's a Long Way To Tipperary" – except for Kate – and "Sister Susie Sewing Shirts for Soldiers." It's been refreshing to have new music.

Despite the music, I hope to be home soon.

Much Love, Claire

LILY: I'm well and feeling fine. The music you sent has helped keep our spirits up these days. Thank you for that. Take care of yourselves. I'll write again soon.

All my love.

Yours, Lily

OLIVIA: I haven't been feeling so well lately, but I am eating better. I miss you, but I know this war must be ending soon. It can't last forever.

I love you.

Sincerely, Olivia

KATE: When the war is over, I hope we can dance together. I look forward to it.

Yours, Kate

The girls each put down their pens and put their letters into envelopes to mail them. Lights out.

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

**SOMEWHERE IN
FRANCE IS A LILY**

By Kate Guyton

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