

was at a place about twenty-five miles from Brussels. I was very anxious to see her, as I had no news, and so I started out early in the morning with someone who is staying here to look her up. I expected to be a night away, so took a little basket. We got away without being noticed, and got into a train full of peasants, which took us to the boundary, near Laeken. Then we walked about a mile, and found a potato cart going along the road. Its owner gave us a lift for three or four miles, and then we walked again. We got to a village called M— (it isn't safe to mention names) and found it full of German soldiers. They looked at us curiously, but didn't take any notice so we went on. Presently we came upon a whole regiment who were laying barbed wire across the road, and entrenching themselves behind earthworks. It looked as if we had got into a kettle of fish, but the only thing to do was to go on and look as if we had as much right as anyone. So I went just as if I owned the earth, and spoke in German to one as I passed, and he evidently thought I was of that charming nationality, for he let us pass. Well, we got quit of them and walked on to another village called W—. Just as we got in the village street we heard firing quite close. It was a lovely day, and the village looked peaceful. It sounded just like shooting partridges. Then pom-pom-pom, and the mitrailleuses began, and before you could say knife all the shops were closed, and shutters shut up, and doors closed. Then firing began again within 150 yards of us, and a man shouted to us to get under cover quick. So we dashed in with him behind a manure heap, but the owner came out and would not allow us to stay there, and told us to go to a hotel, so we went along, and then five or six German soldiers passed us, running away for their lives. They brushed against my cloak as they passed, and stopped for a second, and I thought they were going to shoot us. They were horrible to see. They were a livid sort of yellow, and breathing in deep gasps. They fled on, and then some cyclists, German soldiers, flashed past us, then horses galloping. A Belgian outpost had surprised a German outpost. So we went rather quickly along to the hotel, and when they saw us coming they shut the door in our faces. We parleyed with them through the window, and they said it would be dangerous for them if we came in. So we tried to get out of the village (the mitrailleuse was still going on), but no one was allowed to leave the village, and the road we had come by was blocked too. We stood in the street a few minutes, and then a doctor came up and bundled us into a convent. We waited about half-an-hour, but then heard that both ways out of the village were blocked, and the nuns advised us to try and get back to Brussels (about thirteen miles away) by a back lane which led out of the convent to the high road eventually. We walked about two miles down this peaceful country road, seeing no one, when we came to a place where four roads met. There was a

woman at a tiny farm, and I asked her the way. She only spoke Flemish, of which I know very little, and either she misunderstood me or I misunderstood her, but I understood her to say that we must go down a very muddy little lane, which we did. At the bottom was a German sentinel, but we didn't think much of that, and I have my brassard stamped with the German eagle now, so I showed that as I passed, and he saluted and said "Pardon," and we passed on. Now I realise that he thought I was a German Sister of Mercy, my uniform being very plain and black, or else he would not have let us pass, for in two minutes we fell right into the whole German camp—thousands of them, with cannons, wagons, camp fires, everything. An officer came up and asked what we wanted. He, of course, saw at once I was not German, so I got out my Belgian *carte d'identité*. My companion did not speak French or German, so I had to do the conversation, and mercifully she kept still and did not lose her head. He searched us and let us go, but we were right in the thick of them, and did not know how to get out nor which way to go. We went the wrong way first, and had to retrace our footsteps. At last we got on the Brussels road, but had to pass seven sentinels, none of whom discovered we were English, luckily for us, as they hate the English much more than the Belgians. We were searched twice, and I had to show my *carte d'identité* each time. Luckily, I had got it stamped with the German eagle, so we got through. We had nearly got to Brussels when an officer came galloping after us, and asked me every question under the sun. I had to say we were English, and he was so astounded at our cheek in walking clean through all the German lines that at last, after scoldings and threats, he let us go, and we got back safe. The account of the skirmish was in the paper, and it said several were wounded, which we did not know then.

September 21st.

Every English nurse has orders to leave Brussels to-day. At first we had orders to go to Liège, but now the sentence has been altered to Ostend. How nice that will be I can't tell you.

Seventy German nurses arrived in Brussels this morning. I know Schwester Agnes Karll and some of her nurses. I wonder what would be the etiquette if we met? The Kaiser has been here, too, for a few hours, but all traffic was stopped, and nobody saw anything.

September 29th.

Still here in Brussels, and can't get away to Ostend, as no one may enter or leave it. The Germans won't allow any English nurses to nurse the wounded. . . It is miserable everyone being idle when there is so much awful misery and suffering, but they are fighting all round, and I think it will be nearly impossible to get out.

Yours, &c.

VIOLETTA THURSTAN.

*previous page*

*next page*