

Dear Mother and All

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ACT I

PRELUDE

About 15 minutes before the play begins, people begin to arrive for VERNON's farewell party. There should be music playing as well as food being served and dancing. The mood is festive. (Author suggests: *NOLA, SHIM-ME-SHA-WABBLE, LET ME CALL YOU SWEETHEART, I WISH I COULD SHIMMY LIKE MY SISTER KATE, MEET ME TONIGHT IN DREAMLAND, SMILES, TIGER RAG* and *TILL WE MEET AGAIN*) When the entire cast is assembled and the final song is playing, OLD HELEN makes her way unseen through the crowd.

SCENE 1: FAREWELL

OLD HELEN

There's going to be a party here tonight. You see my brother's joined the Marines and he's off to camp at midnight and then across to France to fight the Huns. That's him dancing over there with Grace Hering. My older sister Dofe - nobody's called her Dorothy since she was born - well Dofe says Vernon and Grace are practically engaged. But Ethel says there's been no ring exchanged and without a ring it can never be a real engagement. Ethel might be our oldest sister - twenty-five - and the smartest, but to tell the truth, it's been more than six years since a boy came to see her alone. My Mother calls our brother Vernon to keep from mixing him up with our father, Charles, Sr. - but the rest of us call him Chas. That's my father over there now serving punch, though don't expect to find a drop of liquor in it. No, Dad's been temperance since he was a glassblower back East in New Jersey. There wasn't enough money to feed a family of six blowing glass bowls and pitchers, so he came here to Massillon Ohio back 1906 to work in the steel mills -- and we've never looked back East since. My mother Lena is the one passing out the cookies. She always says that tasting is her only vice, and you can probably take that as the complete and honest truth. Mother is a card carrying Methodist with no room in her life for lies or common household dirt. She's been baking, tasting and cleaning for days since this is the biggest party we've ever had. Our social life usually revolves around the Wesley Methodist Church - which isn't all that exciting when you're young. But Mother believes anyone can benefit from the Wesley which is why she takes everyone, including little Henry Jones and his family every Sunday, rain or shine. The nervous looking boy in the corner, that's

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OLD HELEN

Chester Potts -- Chet to his friends. Chet was all fired up to join the Marines, and it looks like he finally got his best friend to go with him. He and Vernon joined up early last week -- though Chas overslept and had to take the streetcar up to Cleveland by himself. If the train wasn't leaving at midnight he would probably oversleep again. But Chet will be there to make sure there's the two of them on that train. Now the wildest boy here has got to be Ralph Bowers. That's him doing card tricks in the corner, though Helen Scott certainly seems to find him amusing. And the sweetest boy would have to be Roy Hartung. He's over there playing checkers with little Henry Jones. Roy's going to be teaching Manual Training at the high school this fall. He loves dogs, cats and all creatures great and small.

(CHARLES kisses GRACE)

Oh my! I guess even the best Methodist would have allowed at least one farewell kiss on such a warm and beautiful April night. I almost forgot, the young girl with the braids who's watching that kiss - well, that's me, Helen Brown. They'll say I'm the baby of the family, but tonight I'm a full fifteen and three-quarters!

RALPH

A toast to the handsome and brave young Charles Vernon Brown.
(Leads the others in singing.)

ALL

FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW. FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW.
FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLLLLLL-OOOOOWWWW

RALPH

Who's gonna be the best darn Marine in old Massillon town?

HENRY

(jumping up excitedly)

Vernon Brown! Vernon Brown!

ALL

Aaahhhhhh.

RALPH BOWERS

You're damn right!

ALL

Ohhhhh.

VERNON

Excuse my friend's language ladies.

CHESTER

But now you see why Mr. Ralph Bowers is not gonna be a Marine!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RALPH

Not yet, Pottsy, but you just keep looking over your shoulder.

ALL

Whoooooa.

(Author suggests a ragtime music selection like *HOLD THAT TIGER RAG* plays as the young folks dance and the older ones watch. A train whistle is heard in the distance as the music stops.)

RALPH BOWERS

Three cheers for the handsome and brave Charles Vernon Brown.

VERNON

Come on Ralph.

HENRY JONES

Hip, Hip.

ALL

HOORAY!

HENRY JONES

Hip, Hip.

ALL

HOORAY!

HENRY JONES

Hip, Hip.

VERNON

No, no, Henry, we'll save that last one 'til we're all back home again.

HENRY JONES

Hooray!

(There is general laughter. Then the music begins again and remains low under speaking.)

GRACE

I promise to write. Everyday.

VERNON

I'll be back before you've had time to miss me.

GRACE

Did I say I'd miss you?

RALPH

I'll make sure she doesn't get too lonely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VERNON

I don't think so Mr. Bowers.

RALPH

Don't look so sad, Grace, you know nothing's going to happen to this boy - he owes me ten bucks!

VERNON

And I promise the Kaiser's ears to you.

RALPH

Forget the ears, Brownie, just save a few of those beautiful French girls for me.

(TRAIN whistle is now very close.)

CHET POTTS

Train's coming, Chas. We can't miss this one.

VERNON

Just a minute more Pottsy.

(VERNON takes HELEN aside)

Now do your studying Helen, or you'll have me to answer to.

(Embraces sisters.)

ETHEL

Here's some extra cookies, Chas.

DOROTHY

And I'll make some of that candy you like.

CHET POTTS

(running in breathless)

We've got to go now Chas, no kidding this time.

MOTHER

We're be looking for your letters, son. (kisses him warmly)

VERNON

Promise you won't worry.

MOTHER

I know everything will be just fine.

FATHER

Here, son, just in case you need a little something extra.

(Shakes VERNON's hand and slips him two one dollar bills.)

VERNON

Thanks and I promise I'll write just as often as I can.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FATHER

And I promise to read just as often as I can, but you're mother's the letter writer, right Lena?

CHEP POTT

Now!

VERNON

Good-bye everyone, and thanks for the cookies. (exits)

MOTHER

Good-bye son.

(The train whistle fades as the music ends.)

SCENE 2: TRAINING

DOROTHY runs in waving some letters.

DOROTHY

Look, everybody - mail!

MOTHER

Run and get your father.

HELEN

Dad, come quick, it's mail from Chas.

(The family moves around the kitchen table as they read Vernon's letters. This will often be the place where letters are read.)

MOTHER

April 26, 1918, Dear Mother and All, arrived in Atlanta Georgia safely after some ride on the train all night. Leave tomorrow morning at 6:30 AM. Your son, C.V.Brown.

(Girls applaud)

ETHEL

April 27, ready to leave again. This B & O is not so bad - but not like home at all.

DOROTHY

April 28, Am settled in now, so here's the cook's tour of Paris Island. This is the boat that brought us over from Port Royal and here's the dock we landed on.

HELEN

(Taking the post card excitedly)

This is the center of our camp, or what you might call our square. And this is the east wing,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HELEN / VERNON
(TOGETHER)

I live on the west wing. That's the new side.

(VERNON is in his soldier's uniform and overlaps speaking with HELEN as he points out "sites" as if he is talking directly with his family)

VERNON

We have two YMCA's here, but they both look just the same. The mess hall's on the right and those are our bunk houses' over there on the left. Here's the place we went to after leaving the applicants camp, and I've marked our company street with a big "X". Those shanties you see are gone now, and that other long building is the Main barracks Hospital.
(Soldiers take turns at target practice)

MOM

Dear Vernon, we're so glad you arrived safely. It seems so long since you've left already. Ethel has started to work at the Brewster office doing clerical and though we're not exactly sure just what her salary will be.

HELEN

Dad says it won't be under \$65

FATHER

And it may be as much as \$71.50.

(ETHEL, the family artist, sets up her easel and begins to sketch. She will often return to her sketching or painting, sitting or standing, throughout the play)

MOTHER

We all hope the latter. Ethel says the work isn't so hard and though she still hasn't given up the idea of teaching art again, she's seems happy to be close to home this winter

HELEN

This shows some fellows shooting from the...the...
(stumbling over words)

MOTHER

Prone position.

HELEN

Prone position and those fellows sitting on stools are the coaches.

DOROTHY

Let me see that letter, Helen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HELEN

There's only one more line left anyway, Dofe, and it's not my fault I can't read his handwriting!

(HELEN starts to run out and FATHER stops her)

FATHER

Your brother writes just like me, Helen. That's why I let your mother and you girls do the writing.

MOTHER

More like chicken scratches your grandmother used to say.

FATHER

-- and that's nothing to be proud of, but believe me, you mustn't be angry with your sister for trying to help. We all miss your brother in our own ways.

DOROTHY

Here, Helen, you read it.

HELEN

Each man shooting has his own coach and you'd be surprised how much this can help a fellow.

VERNON

Here we've got to learn as much as we can, as fast as we can. And, of course, if we're gonna give those Huns the devil and march'em straight back to Germany where they belong, well, then we've got to be better than good. And I'll tell you, I see a Hun's face on each little bulls eye I hit!

MOM

Shirley Smith has left the Central Steel and is down at the Brewster in the drafting department. She's been giving Ethel a ride to work every day now and it sure makes it easier on all of us.

VERNON

Well Mother, I'm sending home my suit case today. Today -- April 30th, I'm a Marine now and I'm feeling just fine.

(FATHER brings in a map of EUROPE and puts it up so that he can follow the war.)

MOTHER

Sometimes I think I should learn to drive. But honestly, Vernon, with no car here, and Dad so busy, well son, I think I'll just wait for you to come home and teach me yourself.

HELEN

My friends all loved your post cards. Will you send some more?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

I received your letter this morning Charles, and what do you suppose? You had my address as 402 Duncan. I guess in all your hurry you didn't notice. It did look funny though for the Post Office had written " No Such Number " across the envelope. I guess I shouldn't worry because it's here now...in my hands... (holds it tenderly)

VERNON

(VERNON and DOFE stand in tandem to one another)

So my Dofe wants a pin, too. Sorry I haven't written more, but we just moved over to the main training camp and we've been busy unpacking and drilling - we drill all the time now... Except when it rains...

(Thunder claps.)

It's raining now so we got to come inside and get dry. It's really hot here and wet even when there's no rain at all! We get better eats here and we don't live in tents anymore. We're in bunk houses now... and have electric lights and other things that make it more like home. Well - almost like home. The rain has stopped now and I should get to my wash. So you tell everyone I'm feeling fine and hope you all write soon. P.S. That candy just touched the spot and you can send more of it any time you wish.

DOROTHY

Here's hoping you wish to often.

VERNON

By the way Dofe? There's this fellow from New York who wanted your address. He's one of my bunkies and a real fine chap. (Pause) So? What do you think?

DOROTHY

I think Chas...(Pause) YES! You may give him my address!
(This next section is overlaps as a duet)

VERNON

As a token from me, I ask you to wear,

DOROTHY

This small service emblem, please guard it with care.

VERNON

It will remind you and others that I am away,

DOROTHY

Just doing my bit,

VERNON

For the old USA.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOROTHY

Your brother, C.V. BROWN

(VERNON joins rifle drill; SOPRANO sings a popular military song. Author suggests *OH HOW I HATE TO GET UP IN THE MORNING*. Instrumental continues under VERNON)

VERNON

I received the box you sent last night, Mom, and it was all OK, except the watch, which is now broken. I'm sorry to say I wore it out to the shooting range this morning and I guess the jar of the gun was a little too much. It broke the face right open. I didn't mean to wear it, honest, I just forgot to take it off. I was hoping Dad could find a way to fix it up, and maybe when it's done you could send it wherever I'm sent. So - what do you think?

MOTHER

Papa?

(FATHER is taking the watch out of the mail)

FATHER

It's broken all right. But it's nothing that can't be fixed. I'll get my tools.

VERNON

And just so you understand -- (Pause) I didn't try to get to be an officer since I'm just trying to be the best darn Marine I can.

(Vernon marches off. Music fades into shooting and gun-fire)

DOROTHY

What's he say?

ETHEL

He's shooting for the record and he says he's already made 124 out of 150 points on the two hardest ranges but he still needs another 129 points to make expert.

HELEN

That's the highest.

DOROTHY

How do you know that?

HELEN

Ralph Bowers told me.

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CONTINUED:

DOROTHY

Ralph Bowers doesn't know a thing about being an expert anything!

(Spray of gunfire)

VERNON

We're done all right (Pause) and I missed expert by 4 points. It was tough luck all right - But Potts missed it by 8! I couldn't finish this letter until just now, since we've got this new Sergeant who thought he'd give us all a little extra drilling practice before we went up to the range, and then a little when we got done! I'll tell you, I'm pretty tired all right -but I think I did just fine.

HELEN SCOTT

(Dreamily) Oh, Chas, I hope you're still on Paris Island when you get this letter - I've just been carrying it around for days.

ETHEL

Enclosed find a couple of new pictures of me and my friends. I won't be writing for a while since we're shoving off this island tomorrow and moving on up to Quantico - that's in Virginia and Chet Potts is going along too.

HELEN SCOTT

I suppose you've been looking for those pictures I promised? Well, here they are!

(Holding and waving many photos)

Don took both of them. Don Strang from Canton. You remember him, don't you? One of their football eleven from two years ago. Anyway, I hope you like them. I liked your letters a lot and even though I know you are doing something really wonderful, I don't think I should ever like to be a soldier, but I'm sure I'll never have to worry about that...though I was surprised to read how often they make you clean. Do you really have those inspections every single day?

VERNON

Well, it's June 18th, and we've finally landed at a real camp!

HELEN SCOTT

I did really well with all my exams this year. I passed every one of them with flying colors!

VERNON

I know it sounds too good to be true, - but this place seems like heaven! We're done work by 5 o'clock, then there's nothing to do but sit around and wash a few clothes. Saturdays we're suppose to get done by noon and then we're at liberty 'til Monday morning.

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HELEN SCOTT

(PAUSE) Chas? You know neither one of these pictures is really very good.

VERNON

I think maybe I'll get a little trip to Washington, D.C. next Saturday and if I can make good connections I might even get all the way to Philadelphia. I have to hit the hay now. We rode the train straight thru from Monday midnight 'til 2 PM today with no place to sleep except our seats.

HELEN SCOTT

Come to think of it, the really best picture was taken from me last night, and so just as soon as I get another good one, I promise to send it right along.

VERNON

I ate 5 sandwiches and 2 cups of coffee during the whole trip, and wasn't I hungry when we got here! But believe me when I tell you, they have some fine grub here. Really it's just like home. You don't get drilled to death here! Oh, no, not by a long shot. We have a fine Sergeant now, as we left that other curst one back at Paris Island.

HELEN SCOTT

Can you believe, Charles, I'll be a full-fledged Freshie next year?

VERNON

According to our Sergeant it won't be long 'til we're all overseas.

HELEN SCOTT

Gee! Won't I just swell up then?

VERNON

I sure hope so. We've waited long enough and I'm ready to go.

HELEN SCOTT

But listen, enough of me, I really want that picture you wrote me about of you in your uniform and I hope you'll send me one just as soon as you get it back.

VERNON

I haven't seen any other boys from Massillon, but there's no time to look them up anyway. They're in twenty-one day quarantine and we're at work learning signals, skirmish, bayonet, trench and gas mask drills.

MOTHER

Son, we're so happy to hear you're finally settled into a place that's so comfortable

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CONTINUED:

HELEN

Is the food really good?

MOTHER

Your brother doesn't lie.

VERNON

Did I tell you, Mom, my pay's been increased \$3.00 a month now for making sharpshooter?

HELEN

Why do they shoot straw targets if they want to learn to shoot German soldiers?

MOTHER

Go ask your father.

HELEN

Dad? Why does Chas have to shoot at straw targets?

MOTHER

Dofe's gone off to Brady Lake for her summer studies and with Ethel working our Helen has taken a great interest in your soldiering.

(MOTHER begins cooking)

HELEN SCOTT

The next time I write I promise to have better ink, since I'm sure you'll have to put your glasses on to read this. But this was all I could find since I haven't been out of the house in days. I got sick on Monday and had to stay in bed 'til part of Wednesday, and to tell you the truth, here it is Sunday and I still don't feel my old self yet.

(Author suggests *MARINE'S HYMN* underneath)

VERNON

This afternoon, the 21st of June, they took us on a 6 mile march. It was raining nearly the whole time we marched. We got pretty well soaked, all right - soaked right down to the bone. We marched fully equipped with rifle, gas mask, and heavy marching order which weighs 50 pounds or more. That's quite some load on your shoulders when you're not used to it. But like it or not, we'll have to get used to it!

HELEN SCOTT

I promise to write a lot more next time. And, Charles, I'll be looking for those pictures in every mail.

VERNON

Well, folks, I'm a squad leader now and I'm trying hard to make corporal.

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CONTINUED:

HELEN SCOTT

Oh! I almost forgot. Ralph said to be sure to tell you, "Yes!" he'll write as soon as he can, and "No," he hasn't enlisted yet.

VERNON

Yesterday afternoon, Secretary of the Navy Daniels spoke to us of the overseas battle and he claims the Marines are the best fighting men in the world. Believe me, we're going over to prove it, and let's hope it's soon!

(MUSIC ends with flourish)

SCENE 3: TRIPS AND SHIPS

MOTHER

We're so proud of you too, Son. A squad leader already! And weren't you excited to get to hear the Secretary of the Navy himself.?

HELEN

If he says you're the best then you must be, don't you think?

MOTHER

Surely they'll give you one pass before you go over, son.

VERNON

MOM! I've got a pass to Washington, D.C.!

(VERNON kisses his pass and runs off on his "trip" to the Washington monument. Some ragtime or fast-paced music should underscore. Author suggests *JA-DA* while the family freezes in whatever they are doing)

DOROTHY

(carries picnic basket)

Dear Brother, I've been thinking every day I'll get to write, but here it is, over a week, and I'm just now getting 'round to it.

VERNON

This is some city, all right! And some monument, too. Did you know the Washington Monument is 508 feet from top to bottom. I don't think I've ever been up so high. And you can look straight out from these little windows and see for miles around.

DOROTHY.

Tomorrow night we're having a picnic across the lake. Some boys who live next door are going to take us across in their canoes. There are eleven girls in our cottage including our chaperon, Miss Sarah Gibson. We're up to the College by seven

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DOROTHY.

o'clock in the morning and have our music and lessons done by noon. And then when we're through the man who drives the bus comes after us and brings us back to the lake. I guess it's really sort of fun if you want to be a music teacher. You have such a good voice, maybe you could teach music too!

VERNON

So we walked clear to the top and back down again. TWICE! Then there's this Massillon paper, The Massillon Telegraph or the Telegram or whatever, it was put right in the corner stone when they built the monument. At least that's what this poster says at the bottom. Some city, all right. Some time and some city.

(Music ends and the family unfreezes)

MOTHER

Marjory Mader's had her tonsils and her adenoids removed, too. Marjory's getting along just fine, but now Helen Sailer's thinking about having her tonsils taken out too.

VERNON

Got back in camp about 4 o'clock this afternoon. I had to come back as all my money gave out. That Washington certainly is some city and did I tell you we saw the White House, too! Gee it's pretty. Nothing like that in Massillon.

ETHEL

Marty Waters and Helen Urban were married last week. A very quiet little ceremony.

VERNON

I think we'll be leaving camp for overseas next Wednesday or Thursday.

ETHEL

He has a very good job promised to him in Cleveland already.

VERNON

But don't you worry about me since we'll be getting a lot more training before we go into those trenches.

ETHEL

A cousin of Marty's is a foreman in one of those big factories.

VERNON

Seems like I won't be getting into that radio work after all. I just don't think I have enough electrical experience and then I never did study trigonometry - even though you both said I should.

ETHEL

He's willing to give him 70 cents an hour and two rooms in his home free.

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CONTINUED:

VERNON

Some of the fellows made it all the way to New York City on their pass - Ah, oh, well, maybe when I get back.

DOROTHY

(eating candy)

I made you some more candy, Chas, but you know what?

VERNON

I don't think I'll ever see that box of candy you sent to Paris Island, Dofe.

DOROTHY

I forgot to mail it. I hope you're not too mad. I was just so busy and then it looked so good...I ate it myself!

VERNON

I'm sure some other soldier with a sweet tooth will relish it as much as I would have. But please, don't send me anymore until I get overseas.

DOROTHY

You should have seen all the stuff in my trunk! It took Dad and me two trips to move it all. Helen was more trouble than help, as usual. But she's getting so grown up, Chas. I can't wait til you're home to see her.

VERNON

Did you get those pictures I sent to you, yet? I sure hope so, though I expect to mail some even better ones this week.

DOROTHY

Did I tell you we're getting the whole house wired for electricity? It's true. Dad told me just before I left. They're suppose to do it all next week, so you've got to get to see it before you go.

VERNON

We're getting some really fine grub here, especially the bread. I suppose it's better than you folks can get there. Pure wheat bread. Smells great!

DOROTHY

We've been having very cold weather here, and I can tell you it was hard keeping warm on that lake. But I guess we've been having some fun all right, though sometimes I wish I hadn't come up here - with you gone and everything so different.

VERNON

It sure must be nice at home with all those electric lights on.

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DOROTHY

If I have the pep I'll make you another box of candy today, I promise, and mail it before I leave.

MOTHER

Vernon? Do you think you'll be getting home before you go?

VERNON

I still don't know if you ever got my watch. But anyway, I'm sending you a few bullets like we use in our rifles. You can put all 5 of those bigger shells in the rifle at the same time, and the smaller one's a misfire out of a revolver. I also sent Helen some sheet of music which is the Marines Hymn. I thought she might get a chance to play it - and maybe, if she's not too busy, Grace Hering might come over and sing along with her.

DOROTHY

If you get leave while I'm up here Chas?

VERNON

I don't see how I could get home now, Mom.

DOROTHY

I promise I'll come right back home.

VERNON

Just today they posted a notice saying no furloughs except in cases of serious sickness or death - and I sure hope we have neither of those.

HELEN

You just can't leave without seeing our new electric lights!

VERNON

I'll bet it's real nice there now, and hot, too. Well, it's nice here too and cool. I've hardly sweat a drop since I left Paris Island. (Pause) Anyway, I'm dead broke, Mom so I'm sending you this telegram since I wanted to get some souvenirs before we leave and I don't really think we'll get paid for a while.

ETHEL

A Thackwell boy and Chubby Jones have joined the Aviation Corp. and both of Mrs. Manley's boys are at Paris Island. I think Duane Elliott's going for Officer but I only hear bits and pieces when we get together at church.

HELEN

Do the soldiers get to go to church.

ETHEL

They have a Chaplain.

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HELEN

Is he a Methodist?

ETHEL

(Pause) Sometimes.

VERNON

I received the money this evening and want to thank you both very much. I hope the telegram didn't scare you any? It's just that we have our overseas clothes now and could shove off any time and I just didn't want to take a chance the money would be delayed in the mail. I hope you understand.

MOTHER

Yes we understand about the money for the souvenirs, and no, the telegram -

HELEN

--which I thought was really wonderful--

MOTHER

--didn't scare us -- exactly, but it was our first one, Vernon, and in these days, son, well no one is ever quite so pleased to see them as they would have been before the war.

GRACE

Did you get that last letter I sent to Paris Island, Chas? Gee, I really hope so. And if you didn't -- well, sometimes I really hate this mail!

VERNON

I'm sending Dad a real service flag to put in the window. And tell Helen I'll get to answer her letter a little later.

GRACE

Tough luck about not getting that cigarette case Ralph sent. Since this war started you can't count on the mail at all. You can only send something to the Expeditionary forces overseas when someone requests it - so I thought that you could write and ask me for the cigarette case in your letter. Then I could send it overseas to you in my answer! How's that for clever.

(FATHER brings in a flag and HELEN and DOROTHY help him hang it)

MOTHER

You must be getting so tired, son, waiting all this time and never knowing exactly when you'll go. (Pause) Your father and I know you'd come home if you could.

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CONTINUED:

VERNON

Is Helen really getting to work on her studies? If she really gets serious about school she might do a whole lot better next fall. Of course it's easy for me to say these things, sitting here so far away from all of you, but honestly Mom, you should see the way she writes those letters.

GRACE

I don't see why they have to have such complicated rules. Personally, I'll never understand this war or the mail!

MOTHER

The house is looking so lovely and your father's been thinking about planting some vegetables this summer.

ETHEL

Will you be going straight to France?

VERNON

Whatever you do please don't worry about me

ETHEL

Dofe just loved that pennant

HELEN

And I've already learned that Marines Hymn by heart. And yes - - Grace did come by and I played it for her.

VERNON

It'll be three or four months before I'm in any danger at all - and then we're the best trained fighting men in the world!

MOTHER

Your father's already put the flag up in our window.

HELEN

It looks real nice, too. (exits)

ETHEL

And everyone smiles when they see it.

VERNON

The latest report is that we'll definitely leave tomorrow -- or Saturday for sure. We turn in our khaki's tomorrow, and that means we'll be wearing winter underwear and heavy green suits or overseas clothes. They can't keep us long in those!

MOTHER

There were eight children baptized week in church last week. What a sight!

FATHER

And what a sound. Don't forget to write that Mother.

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CONTINUED:

VERNON

Oh, by the way, did I tell you I was insured for \$10,000? It costs about \$6.75 a month which they take out of our pay and everybody's suppose to get it unless they have a good written excuse. I didn't get the papers yet but I'll send them as soon as they come.

MOTHER

I wonder if you're already on your way? Sometimes I think we'll never catch up with your letters.

VERNON

You could send me that watch now if it's all fixed. A good plan would be to send it and have it insured or special delivery, then they would be more careful about seeing that I got it all right.

MOTHER

Helen's gone to Wellsville with Johnson's in their auto. They have a daughter about her age so I suppose she'll have a good time. (Pause) It sure seems quiet around here when she's gone, too.

VERNON

I got a letter from Aunt Phebe yesterday and she told me I was the only one of her four nephews that ever wrote to her. She said she'd be glad to come to Philadelphia to see my train off, but to tell you the truth, you never know anything that far in advance.

MOTHER

Today Edna was over for a visit. She's expecting a new baby to come to her house in November.

VERNON

You tell Grace's father I'll bring the Kaiser back for him to display in his show window. And that's no joke. P.S. I've sent this service pin for Dad to wear and hope you like yours too.

MOTHER

The flag looks quite wonderful in the window. Did I write that before? And we both love our service pins and wear them with pride wherever we go.

FATHER

Don't forget to tell him we didn't know anything about the government giving us any life insurance on him.

MOTHER

And no son, we didn't know about the life Insurance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FATHER

---and we don't want any of it either!

(FATHER stomps out of the room)

MOTHER

But we know you'll be home before we know it. Love. Mother and All.

GRACE

I don't know whether you received that letter I mailed to Quantico yet or not, so if you did get it already you can just skip the parts I've said twice.

VERNON

We're really going to move now for sure. They've taken our sea bags, and we leave tomorrow morning sometime - but just where to I really couldn't say even if I knew. (packing) Well, Mother, I'm finally sending you a pretty good picture of myself and Company "B". They took this last night and today we got to see it. My Lieutenant's in the middle of the short front row and the corporal and sergeant are on either side. I'm about the 11th one from the left in the front long row seated. We have on our Khaki uniforms and you won't get the pictures of me alone in my green uniform 'til later. A photographer in Washington took those and I won't know how they will come out, but I'm having a dozen sent to you at \$1.50 apiece COD from Washington. If they're good please send one to Aunt Emma and Aunt Phebe and each of the following names including Grace Hering.

GRACE

Thanks so much for the pin you. I'm just wild about it. In fact I haven't taken it off a minute since it arrived!

VERNON

My new address will now be Private. C. V. Brown., Company "B" 2ND Casual Batt. US Marine Corps. American Expeditionary Forces c/o Postmaster New York City.

(Author suggests that Soprano sings *GOOD-BYE BROADWAY HELLO FRANCE*. There is the sound of the train whistle in the distance)

SCENE 3: SHIPS AHOY

VOICE OVER

The Red Triangle goes every step of the way. At home or overseas it means that soldiers and sailors are welcome.

FATHER

July 11. The ship on which I sailed has arrived safely overseas. Charles V. Brown. (APPLAUSE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER

By this time, son, you know what a trip across the ocean means which is more than I imagine your father and I will ever know.

FATHER

Ask him if he came through it all right or did he get sick?

MOTHER

Did you stand it all right, son?

FATHER

On second thought Mother, don't mention a thing about getting sick.

HELEN

Or did you get seasick? We hear everyone gets seasick.

MOTHER

We waited all week hoping to get some word that you had crossed safely.

HELEN

Then the card and the letter you wrote both came on the same day.

ETHEL

The pictures arrived today of you in your uniform.

DOROTHY

And they're very good.

HELEN

But you had a REAL serious look on your face.

DOROTHY

I think you looked quite handsome.

HELEN

They don't make you have that serious look on your face all the time, do they?

MOTHER

I'm so glad you had them taken, son. You look as if you were in very fine condition and your father and I were so glad to see you looking so well.

(MARIE is a very Mae West looking character as she walks on in her very large hat)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARIE

Dear Unknown Charles, I take great pleasure in writing you this little note. I suppose you will not even know who I am since I took your name and address off the train window as it passed through the station in Philadelphia. I was one of those three girls standing on the platform, more specifically, I am the one who was wearing that very large hat. Remember me now? (Pause) No doubt you'll be glad to receive this short letter from me, especially since by now you're so far away from America. I personally have never been farther than Maryland. But I had a very pleasant trip myself down the Chesapeake Bay just last weekend, and though I arrived home quite safely, I actually am not quite rested up yet as the sea air makes me so sleepy. Charles -- is that the way it is for you, too? Was the trip across the ocean thrilling? I'm sorry but I must bring this letter to a close now since I simply don't know what else to say to you until you have written back to me. I would like very much to hear from you real soon. I'd also be very pleased to have a picture of yourself since you are now looking at a picture of me. Until next time, hoping this finds you enjoying the best of health. Wishing you lots of luck and success for the future, your unknown friend, Marie Haas.

MOTHER

Ethel is mounting all the pictures to give out to your friends.

HELEN

She won't let me help her at all, so I am bored.

MOTHER

We're all so glad you arrived safely.

HELEN

Dad really liked his pin and he reads all of your letters twice.

MOTHER

Please write us all the news you feel you dare as we would be glad to hear of your life over there.

HELEN

And please tell me all the news you don't want to tell Mom and Dad since Ralph says you write to him and what you say isn't fit for a lady's ears.

DOROTHY

What does Ralph know about ladies!

ETHEL

And don't you dare tell Grace anything you hear from Ralph.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

Your letter finally came and I was so glad to hear you'd arrived safely. Did you ask your mother to send that picture to me? Gee, that's was nice of you - I'm still waiting for the one of your company and I'm sure with all those directions I'll be able to find you. Won't that be exciting having your mail censored? You don't think they'll open my letters, too?

VERNON

Thank goodness for the YMCA!

GRACE

We had some real excitement here last night. They had a parade to celebrate the wind-up of the War Saving Campaign and the main feature was burying the Kaiser in the canal! The devil came right up and got him - Oh, it was real exciting! (Pause) If only it were true.

VERNON

It sure helps a guy on a Sunday evening to have that good old "Y" nearby. I've just finished eating chow and am heading up there right now.

MOTHER

Mrs. Breckel received word from Charlie in England.

DOROTHY

They were fourteen days going over.
(Goes to get the mail and returns with photos.)

HELEN

And every soldier got seasick.

ETHEL

At least that's what Mrs. Breckel said.

GRACE

Well, I think I'm going to Chicago but I haven't decided what I should do when I get there. Any suggestions?

MOTHER

We finally received your company picture yesterday.

HELEN

Which is very good.

MOTHER

The girls picked you out right away.

HELEN

Are those boys with the other kind of badges the expert shooters?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER

You can see the badges very plain in the picture.

FATHER

Tell him they were a mighty fine looking bunch.

MOTHER

Your father and I think they were a mighty fine looking bunch, too. I suppose you being among them makes them look so good to me.

VERNON

Well, I spent my nineteenth birthday yesterday having a big field inspection in the morning and then fishing in the river all afternoon. Hope I have better luck catching Germans than I did catching fish.

GRACE

I think the Chicago trip is off now - I sure hope not since it's just as dead as ever here and I wanted so much to go - even if I did have to ride in that old Ford! Evelyn and I looked high and low for Dad's extra keys. He's probably hidden them again. He does that to keep me from finding them but I think I'll ask him when he gets home anyway. I'm just crazy about driving!

VERNON

Saturday afternoons and Sundays are suppose to be rest periods over here. But there's really not much rest anymore as we're always getting ready to "Get the Boche!"

MOTHER

Mrs. Manley got word from her youngest saying they had separated the boys at Paris Island. Took all the smaller fellows and were going to send them to Cuba for Coast duty and let the boys down there go overseas.

FATHER

I see by the papers that the big drive has started already.

(Reading his paper as HELEN looks on with him)

I guess things will be getting even tougher now. Don't forget to write that Mother unless you think they'll black it out. Oh, forget it Mother. I'm sure they'll black it out.

MOTHER

Weigart's have bought the Gross property.

HELEN

I guess that means we're gonna have the Weigarts as neighbors for all time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER

And even though they've lived here for years, I still sent Helen over with an apple pie. (shoos her out) Go along.

HELEN

I hate their little dog. Doesn't seem real at all. (Pause) Chas? About this...big drive...what does it really mean...and could you tell me even if you knew? Love, your Helen.

VERNON

Aren't the Americans showing the Boche up just now? Makes a fellow feel really proud.

GRACE

It's been almost 3 weeks to the day since your last note.

MOTHER

Each time I think of you son, which are many times, I breathe a short prayer that God will keep you from evil and from harm.

(HELEN brings in pins and FATHER puts them up on the big map showing the war)

GRACE

So - how goes it now? You still like it there? And wasn't that just dandy that Chet Potts got to go over with you. You must consider yourself lucky having one of your best friend's right there with you, so at least you'll never get homesick.

MOTHER

Little Henry Jones has gone off to visit his Grandma this week and Martha May stopped by last week with three of her children. And oh, my --

GRACE

(GRACE speaks quickly and with great animation)
You're not homesick, are you? I sure hope not since I sure had a taste of it myself when I went away to Chicago last summer. Speaking about Chicago, the trip is definitely on again. That's right and we're suppose to leave today, but it's been raining all day which I suppose will settle this terrible dust but it is making me so anxious to get on the road. If it hadn't rained and if it stayed as hot as it's been, well, I'll tell you, it would not have been a pleasure trip! But it's definitely cooler now - thank goodness, and the air is so much clearer. I imagine it's very nice in France this time of year. Is it nice this year Chas?

FATHER

She sure is some talker.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

I know it was foolish of me to have been homesick in Chicago last summer but I guess it's just my nature. So you think we can really change our nature?

ETHEL

It's July 29th and we've just about given out away all your pictures. I mailed one off to you. I hope you like it.

GRACE

Yes, I did receive those pictures Chas and you should see the nice frame your sister Ethel made for it. Of course, I found your face right off.

MOTHER

Poor Ethel can't seem to make up her mind what to do next year. Mr. Yorke said he was coming up to see her but we still don't know whether he wants her to teach art again next year or not.

GRACE

You can't imagine how busy I've been - getting ready for our trip, knitting for the Red Cross, working in this doctor's office and trying to practice my singing in this heat! I haven't missed a lesson yet...and I've learned that Marines Hymn by heart.

MOTHER

But whether she likes it or not, Ethel will have to decide soon.

GRACE

Ambitious, huh? I try to do as much as I can since it makes a person feel so guilty if you haven't done your share.

MOTHER

Murray Spidle's flying in France now.

HELEN

They say he's a real daredevil.

MOTHER

Whatever that means.

ETHEL

He was a very nice boy.

HELEN

They don't take boys in the Army.

ETHEL

He's not in the Army.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER

He actually joined up with the French Flying Forces.

ETHEL

It's called the Lafayette Esquadriille.

HELEN

I heard they fly over a hundred miles an hour.

ETHEL

Who said?

HELEN

Ralph.

ETHEL

Ralph Bowers!

MOTHER

Weldon Johnson's car is fast enough for me, thank you.

HELEN

Riding in a car can be very dangerous.

ETHEL

Only if Ralph is driving. (laughter)

MOTHER

Anyway, son, they had four letters to his Mother in the Independent Saturday.

HELEN

If you want, we could send in one of yours in too?

ETHEL

He doesn't write his letters for the whole town to read.

HELEN

I said if he wants, Ethel, not that he has to!

VERNON

A bunch of Marines in this camp have been up the line already. They've all been gassed and wounded and are resting up now. But they'll put them back in the line again just as soon as they can.

GRACE

And when you think of all that the fellows have already given up - giving up their school and jobs and families to go over and fight for us - well, I certainly feel foolish saying this to you. So, I'm trying to do my bit - even if it isn't very much - I'm struggling over some leg warmers right now.

(GRACE unhappily holds up uneven leg warmers.)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VERNON

Those Marines certainly have some thrilling stories to tell us. Not like anything you've ever heard before. No, not like anything you've ever heard before.

SCENE 5: FLYING HIGH

GRACE

I suppose you want to know all the town gossip and news - this is such an exciting town! Well, Howard DeHoff married Margarett Graff and they say that Howard Yost has been appointed a Major! Now don't you think he's climbing a little too fast?

(DOROTHY brings in a package with VERNON's watch in it. FATHER will start to work on repairing it and the family will occasionally watch him)

MURRAY

Dear Folks, I received your letters at last! And would you believe they all arrived at once! That's right, today, July 16, my first mail since coming to France. But I think your letters will come a little faster now since I've just finished giving my banker a little lecture on the preciousness of a soldier's mail.

GRACE

I suppose by now, Charles, you're talking like a regular Frenchman. Sometime I'm going to write you a whole bunch of stuff in French and then see if you can answer it.

MURRAY

It's been quite a week here - actually a lot quieter than most - Four Hun Tri-Planes attacked my plane at the other night and shot it up so bad I had to get a new one. That's the third since I got here. And though it may sound like these planes don't last long, they're great little machine's and a pilot's best friend.

(Soprano sings a ballad. The Author suggests *MY BUDDY*)

GRACE

From the looks of the papers the Huns are sure getting theirs. Though it seems that everyone has some idea when this war's going to end, I'm just not really sure myself. With you're being right there I wonder just what you think?

MURRAY

I'll tell you, sometimes I think this wood and canvas has a life of its own and on days when the bullets are flying fast past my head, it's the very will of these little planes to live that seems to keep me in the air. I can remember when you had heart failure if I did 25 miles an hour on the level.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MURRAY (cont'd)

Well, I did 135 the other day trying to catch a Hun, but he got up into a cloud and I lost him. These buses drive like a stone gaining speed all the while. They'd do more all right, but four miles per minute is plenty for this old boy.

GRACE

I promise to start my diary tomorrow. I'll write every little thing that happens and I won't forget a thing and I'll mail it just as soon as we get to Chicago.

MURRAY

We've been doing a lot of flying with little results since most of the Huns are on a push in another sector. But when they come back we'll raise Cain, or rather they will. I did a little night flying last night as three of us went up to try to catch those Gothas that raided England, but we missed connections and I can't say I'm unhappy since it's no fun to attack a machine with as many guns and pilots as a Gotha. But from all indications, my life is pretty safe now, for if a person survives his first month at the front he gets by since 95% are killed by then. I've been over the lines for five weeks and I'm still knocking on wood. I've got this wonderful new bus in place of that old one they shot up and I'd like to tell you its speed but I can't. But I can say it'll climb 1,000 feet in 25 seconds so you can see that it's a good one

GRACE

You know Charles, sometimes, with me in Ohio, and you in France, well, sometimes it seems as if I'm writing to air.

MURRAY

Coming home today I saw this big beautiful French balloon all puffed up and blown out floating in the sky. But when I went over to have a peep at her, I was met with a whole barrage of shrapnel. I guess they were afraid I'd get all tangled up in the telephone wires. Heck of a way to come down, huh, just watching the scenery.

GRACE

Buff Rice is home on a 10 days furlough. Lucky guy, huh? Hoping you're not the least bit homesick yet.

MURRAY

Everybody on this side of the Atlantic is peeved over the censorship rules since those Huns seem to know everything we're going to do before it happens anyway. I've got all kinds of friends over here but because of those censorship rules I can't find a single one. Since I was the last to join this squadron, I won't get a leave for another two months. Each of the guy gets two weeks off and can go anywhere from England to Italy. But I don't care a rap for two weeks leave if I can't come back home.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE

(blows kiss) Au Revoir Charles and - P.S. Just why do they black out so much in your letters?

SCENE 6: CHANGES AND CHARGES.

MOTHER

I'm sorry to say that your wrist watch came back this week. It's never been farther than New York, but your father did fix it up and it seems to be running all right. I'll put it in your room.

(FATHER gives the watch to MOTHER who starts to leave but then stops looking down at it still in her hand.)

VERNON

Ralph Bowers wrote and said he'd stopped by the house and talked to Dofe. He's not taking her out, is he? Chet says hello and we're both just fine.

MOTHER

Now, Vernon if you are in the trenches or have been I surely ought to be able to stand knowing it. Don't be afraid to tell us all you dare. I would rather know it from you than from others. I only hope you can come out safely. I am enclosing a dollar in this letter for some sweets. Tell me when you write if you have gotten all those dollar's I've sent before.

VERNON

I suppose there's plenty of Massillon fellows getting into the service now, but I never see anyone I know over here. There's sure a lot I could tell those boys before they come over...there's sure a lot more I could tell them now before they leave....a lot more.

MOTHER

The American boys are surely fighting hard.

(FATHER walks over to MOTHER and puts his arm around her both protectively and with pride)

FATHER

We're all so proud of them Mother. Tell him how proud we are.

MOTHER

You could write to him too, you know.

FATHER

You're the writer in this family, not me. I just want him to know how we think of him all the time. How we think of all those brave young men.

MOTHER

I promise to write that just the way you said it Father.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FATHER

All those brave young men.,

(FATHER takes the watch back from MOTHER's hand and puts it quietly into his pocket. He will often look at it in the course of the play)

VERNON

(wistful and older)

I never see anyone I know over here and even if I did, there's no real time to talk. Not like last summer 'right after graduation when all we did was talk...and talk...and no, it's not like last summer at all.

ETHEL

Bill Alden's been drinking and Joe told him if he ever smells liquor on him again he'll discharge him.

(OFFICER interrupts heightening "trial" effect. Family freezes.)

OFFICER

In that Private C.V. Brown detached for service with the Army by order of the President, did in France, at about 6:30 AM on the 22ND day of July, 1918, having received a lawful order from Sgt. Adolph C. Paul to take his rightful place at the end of the mess line, willfully disobeyed the same.

VERNON

I will have to close for now with lots of love. And thank Papa for getting that watch up and running and you can send it over here whenever you like.

OFFICER

When ordered to take his rightful place at the end of the mess line by Sargent Paul, Private Brown behaved in an insubordinate and disrespectful manner by answering

VERNON

Who gave you permission to give me orders?

OFFICER

--or words to that effect...

MOTHER

Answer soon.

OFFICER

How do you plead?

VERNON

Guilty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Son?	MOTHER
Charge Two.	OFFICER
Not Guilty.	VERNON
How do you plead?	OFFICER
Hey, Chas?	DOFE
Charge Three	OFFICER
Guilty.	VERNON
Court Rules in Charges One, Two, Three.	OFFICER
This can't be true!	ETHEL
What are they doing to Chas?	HELEN
Guilty.	OFFICER
Chas?	GRACE
Guilty.	OFFICER
Chas?	DOROTHY
Guilty.	OFFICER
Vernon?	MOTHER
Court sentences Charles Vernon Brown to have one half of his pay detained for the next three months.	OFFICER

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FATHER

What's going on there son? Ask him, Mother. Ask him what's going on there?

(Others freeze as Murray nervously enters.)

MURRAY

We fly four or five hours twice a day. One trip's usually to escort a bombing squadron and the next time we go way over the Hun lines, mostly looking for trouble. When we set out across Hunland, they bang away with Archie -dat-dat-dat-dat-dat -dat-dat! That's anti-aircraft guns, and as long as we're getting arched we don't mind so much. I know that sounds funny but it's the quiet, when everything suddenly stops that can drive you crazy. Then a fellow spends an agonizing two seconds, which seems like an eternity in these gas kites, trying to see where those Huns are and when they're going to hop on you. I got into my formation the other night and was travelling along our lines watching an artillery duel when all of a sudden I saw this hail of bullets coming at me. It was then I discovered I'd accidentally crossed into "No Man's Land". I'll tell you that's one place you don't ever want to be. I sure did scamper back fast. But you never want to get caught over there too long because there's no room for accidents in "No Man's Land".

(MURRAY exits and family unfreezes)

HELEN

Just before Mrs. Spidle -

DOFE

-- received her second letter--

ETHEL

-- A telegram arrived saying....

MOTHER

Lt. Murray K. Spidle has been missing in action since July 25th...

HELEN

What's "missing in action" mean anyway?

VERNON

I guess we're getting the best of the Germans right now and the way things look I'll soon be getting my own chance at the Boche.

HELEN

Why won't anyone say what it means! (EXITS)

DOFE

It was his twenty-first birthday, Chas.

(VERNON, OFFICER and GRACE left on stage)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VERNON

General Pershing has said this war will soon be over and we'll eat our Christmas dinner back in the good old U.S.A.

GRACE

Chas, did you hear what they said about Murray.

VERNON

I and many others agree with General Pershing and we're going to help make his statement come true. With lots of love, Your son. C. V. Brown

GRACE

Oh, Chas...they say he's dead.

(FATHER wearily comes in, cranks up the phonograph, takes off his glasses and sits in his rocking chair. The author suggests *LET THE REST OF THE WORLD GO BY*. The lights go off on the stage until only we can only see FATHER and the OFFICER. The OFFICER turns and disappears into a burst of gunfire. Then FATHER turns out the light)

**BLACK OUT/ END
OF ACT**

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Act II**SCENE 1: LIFE GOES ON**

Sandbags, straw and barbed wire now decorate the combat area which should appear more menacing. In the kitchen FATHER's map has a good many more pins on it. As the scene begins, HELEN comes out and cranks up the phonograph. The author suggests a popular tune of the day in a military mode like *OH, HOW I HATE TO GET UP IN THE MORNING*. FATHER comes in with a wash basket and helps MOTHER fold some wash. DOROTHY comes in and turns the phonograph off as she drags HELEN over to the center stage. ETHEL brings in a dress and DOROTHY helps her up on a stool to be fitted for her alterations. The SOLDIERS march in singing and rough housing with one another playfully as they sit down casually as if around a camp site. They should sing something popular and light. The author suggests *K-K-K-KATY*.

MOTHER

I am so thankful to think you got across safely. Aunt Emma wrote that Uncle Mortimer is over now, too, and she thinks he's may already be in the thick of it. She worries about him so much since they say even the doctors aren't completely safe there now. And though I'm worried too, it does make me feel better knowing he is in the same country. Perhaps sometime you'll run across each other.

SOLDIERS

(Playfully singing & dancing)

Mademoiselle from Armentieres, Parley Vous.

Mademoiselle From Armentieres, Parley Vous.

Mademoiselle From Armentieres..,

She hasn't been kissed for forty years...

Hinky Dinky, Parley Vous. (laughter)

VERNON

(stepping out from buddies)

Well, I certainly got in with a fine bunch of fellows here. They're from every part of the country and we've got a fine bunch of officers, too.

MOTHER

Cousin Norman Long of Olean has been called up and Leon Carey hopes to leave with the next bunch from here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOROTHY

You should see Leon.

HELEN

He's gained 37 pounds!

VERNON

Would you believe our Sergeant's from Dayton, Ohio and his name is Longnecker. Heck of a guy, too.

ETHEL

Leon makes 126 boys shipped out this month.

MOTHER

Dorothy's home this week. She goes back to Dr. Zintzmaster's tomorrow to have her tonsils taken out again. She dreads the operation but it must be done now since the Doctor's been made a Major.

ETHEL

He'll be shipped out the first of September.

HELEN

Did Chas have his tonsils out?

ETHEL

Everybody doesn't have their tonsils out.

HELEN

I just was thinking that if he didn't have them out here then if he needed to have them out, he might wait to meet up with Dr. Zintzmaster over there and he could take them out there.

FATHER

Did you write about all the boys sent to Italy.

MOTHER

We've been reading in the paper about quite a few Massillon boys who were sent to Italy Vernon.

FATHER

Maybe he'll meet up with some of them.

DOROTHY

And tell him we heard they made a big fuss when the American's landed there.

HELEN

Did the French girls make a big fuss over you Chas?

MOTHER

Helen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HELEN

Well, what's a BIG FUSS mean anyway!

FATHER

Nothing for you to worry about my girl. Nothing at all.

HELEN

You all treat me like I'm a baby and I'm not. I might not know why you all laugh when someone says what a BIG FUSS the girls made but I know it means something special and I just want the same for my brother!

FATHER

Come sit here and keep your old father company Helen. Please?

(HELEN goes and sits beside her father)

You'll soon be all grown up and gone and your father will have to pack his pipe himself. Here. You do it better than me.

HELEN

(packing his pipe)

You never light it anyway, so I don't know why I do this.

FATHER

Your mother told me when we married if I smoked this pipe it would have to be on the back porch. Took us ten years to get a house with a back porch. Not worth lighting anymore.

VERNON

You can tell Dofe I got that little flag she sent and it was real nice, too.

MOTHER

Alvert Johnson's writes home in every letter how hot it is in San Antonio.

FATHER

And tell him I saw Keely Miller's father downtown and he says Keely's been sent over to Cuba.

VERNON

We're sure heading into the battles now and it'll be a lot harder to write. To be real honest, Mom, I don't think I'd like to run into Uncle Mortimer I mean I like him fine as my Uncle, but no soldier wants to see a doctor over here unless, of course, I accidentally shoot myself in the foot!

HELEN

Can you imagine? Cuba! (Pause) Where is Cuba anyway?

FATHER

A long way from where you brother is, that's for sure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ETHEL

Come on out here Helen and let's get that skirt finished so I can get back to my work.

(Gets a chair for HELEN to stand on. ETHEL and DOROTHY work on the skirt.)

HELEN

When ever I think about Cuba, I just remember seeing all those pictures of that old President Roosevelt riding up the hill with all those...what were they called?

DOROTHY

Rough Riders.

HELEN

Rough Riders -- that's it. I think of all those Rough Riders chasing those Huns all over France.

ETHEL

That was twenty years ago and I don't think there will be Rough Riders in France.

HELEN

Will they use horses?

DOROTHY

Maybe....

HELEN

I think it's cruel to use horses, don't you.

ETHEL

It will probably just be men.

HELEN

And airplanes.

ETHEL

Yes, there will be airplanes.

HELEN

And lots of guns. There will be a lot of guns.

ETHEL

Yes, there will be a lot of guns. Now, look, I've broken this thread again. Just stay until I can get some more. (exits)

HELEN

Do you ever wonder Dofe?

DOROTHY

Wonder what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HELEN

What it's really like to be in France right now?

DOROTHY

Yes.

HELEN

Sometimes I don't think Chas really tells us the truth when he writes. Or if he tries they just black it all out so we won't know.

DOROTHY

They have to be careful about the security.

HELEN

But they really don't want us to know the bad things do they?

DOROTHY

I think it would be too hard if we knew the truth.

HELEN

So when you do think the truth is for Chas.

DOROTHY

I can't really imagine.

HELEN

Dofe, does it scare you?

DOROTHY

Yes, sometimes I'm very very frightened.

HELEN

For Chas?

DOROTHY

For all of us.

ETHEL

Here you are Helen, now let's see if I can get it right this time.

(ETHEL helps HELEN put on the skirt)

Don't jiggle so much or I'll never get this straight.

HELEN

Do you know what it means to be a paci...pacifis..

ETHEL

I think you mean a pacifist.

HELEN

So, what's one of those.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOROTHY

Someone who doesn't believe in war.

HELEN

I don't believe in war. Does that make me a pacifist?

ETHEL

No sane person believes in war.

HELEN

Does that make me a pacifist?

ETHEL

But sensible people understand that sometimes war is the only way to settle some things.

DOROTHY

It's going to be a beautiful skirt Helen.

HELEN

I heard at school that they put some of those people in jail.

ETHEL

Hand me those scissors Dofe.

HELEN

They can't really put someone in jail just because they don't want to kill someone else they don't even know.

DOROTHY

It was more than just being a pacifist.

ETHEL

Some of those people are in prison for making trouble.

HELEN

What kind of trouble?

DOROTHY

For protesting.

ETHEL

And worse.

DOROTHY

And worse.

HELEN

But if they don't want to kill --

ETHEL

There's been some violence too, Helen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HELEN

But if there was another way to stop all the killing they wouldn't let those boys go on fighting would they?

ETHEL

Women and children are being killed and tortured over there --

DOROTHY

You've seen those pictures in the newspaper, someone had to stop it.

ETHEL

Someone had to say "No!"

HELEN

Did it have to be Chas?

ETHEL

We have to remember all the good things those brave boys are doing.

HELEN

He never talked to me about the war. He said I was too young. But I'm not too young to know he could be hurt, or worse. I try not to think about it. I try to think about all the wonderful things but --

DOROTHY

(embracing her) Oh dear we have to remember all the good things those brave boys are doing. All the good Chas is doing. All the good that will come from this pain. We have to remember Helen. And we have to believe that God is watching over him. It's the only thing that makes it bearable.

(ETHEL is very upset and turns away. HELEN turns to DOROTHY)

HELEN

But they couldn't have made him go if he didn't want to, could they? They wouldn't make him kill somebody if he didn't want to do it, would they?

DOROTHY

They can't make you want to fight, Helen, no I don't believe that but Chas did want to go and he's not afraid of fighting. At least that's what he said and you know he wouldn't lie.

HELEN

Maybe if we had just joined that League of Countries like all the others did then maybe nobody would have to fight --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ETHEL

(interrupting) It's the League of Nations and that wouldn't have stopped what has happened over there now. There are women and children like you and me and Mother being murdered and worse. We can't just think of ourselves Helen.

HELEN

You don't know all that for sure, do you?

ETHEL

I believe our President and he says this is a good war. A war to end all wars. If we take a stand here than maybe our children won't have to ever go through this again. Isn't that worth all this pain?

HELEN

But maybe if we'd signed that treaty in the beginning this wouldn't have happened at all.

DOROTHY

A lot of people signed that Treaty and they're all fighting too Helen.

HELEN

I heard Mr. Jones called Mr. Wilson the Peace President but everyday all we read about is people dying.

DOROTHY

I wish it was simple but it's not.

HELEN

Where's the peace in that?

ETHEL

That was before.

HELEN

Before what? I don't understand.

DOROTHY

Believe me, no one else does either.

HELEN

They don't teach us about anything you really need to know about in school.

(taking off her skirt)

ETHEL

I'm not finished yet.

HELEN

(dropping the skirt and running out)

Who cares about a darn skirt anyway!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOROTHY

Helen.

HELEN

Nothing matters but Chas, and he's gone and might never come home again and no one cares but me. (runs off)

ETHEL

I don't know what to say to her anymore, Dofe. I don't know what to say to anybody.

DOROTHY

This war's making us all crazy.

ETHEL

Please go and talk to her. Make her feel better. Make me feel better.

DOROTHY

Helen? Helen, please, I need to talk to you.

(DOROTHY runs after HELEN leaving ETHEL sadly gathering up her sewing things)

VERNON

Aren't the Allies going some now, Mom?

MOTHER

And aren't we all glad to see them making gains so fast, son.

VERNON

Do you read all about it in the newspapers, Mom?

MOTHER

Why we can hardly wait to see those papers everyday, son. Ethel's made Helen two nice new school dresses and it looks like she might go back to teaching this fall after all. Helen's running around here as usual keeping poor Dofe and Ethel busy with her questions. Has she been writing to you? We found an empty tin of cookies under her bed after Dofe left so I expect that's one tin of cookies you'll never eat. Helen seems so full of questions...never has time for her chores, but always has time for more questions.(pause) We sure miss you son.

(FATHER checks in his pocket and pulls out VERNON's watch and looks at it. DOROTHY consoles HELEN and ETHEL stands holding HELEN's skirt)

SCENE 2: OLDER AND WISER

VERNON is hiking on and then sits down and puts his bed roll down. As soon as he begins to settle in and speak, the

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

family mood lightens as MOTHER begins cooking again)

VERNON

It's funny to think we sleep under the stars, and you just wouldn't believe how long a fellow waits between soap and hot water out here. But no one complains as we all believe it is for a good cause, and sometimes on a warm night like this when we're far away enough from the lines to have a campfire and some songs, well, sometimes it doesn't seem half so bad. But it's not like what I expected either, though I guess there's no way they could tell you back home what it will be like over here. And though I guess it's hard to say just what I thought it would be like - it's not like anything I've ever known before. Now more than anything, there's just this waiting -- for what I couldn't tell you. But it's there all the time.

MOTHER

Dear Vernon, just a few lines to tell you what a nice day we had at Turkey Foot Lake Sunday. Johnson's took us up in their new machine and we brought dinner and supper with us both. It was pretty warm, but there was a nice breeze blowing off the water. Dad has off from Saturday until this Monday night as they are building the big furnace over. He's been on the job pretty steady lately, so we're very happy for days like this. (Pause) I know you would have liked it, too.

DOROTHY

Denzil Burrie has a little Saxon machine for a pleasure car and he's always buzzing around home with it.

HELEN

Buzzing around Dofe I'd say.

ETHEL

Helen?

DOROTHY

Denzil's working for the Water Co. and going to school. He keeps his auto down in Wendling's barn now.

HELEN

Dofe thought we could make a garage out of our barn and rent it.

ETHEL

But Dad's working such long hours he wouldn't have the time.

HELEN

Dofe could watch it.

DOROTHY

He's just a friend, Helen!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ETHEL

Mrs. Jones thought you looked very handsome...but so much older in your picture.

(Soprano sings a ballad. The author suggests the song *MEMORIES*)

SCENE 2: OLDER AND WISER

VERNON

I've seen a lot of France lately, but not much of the sights. We travel night and day now and it's gotten so we can hear the roar of the cannons wherever we go. Some fellows say the Germans may be getting tired. After four years at it, some of their lines haven't moved an inch. I sure hope it's true. I hear the Huns don't have much use for Marines. They call us Devil Dogs, at least that's the English. I can't say I want to stay here long enough to learn the German. Well, it's time to move on.

MOTHER

This has been some warm day, son, but this evening we're having showers for which we are so very grateful as it seems this summer's been hot and dry.

DOROTHY

It registered 107 on Tuesday.

HELEN

And today it's 95 in the kitchen!

(Brings in a pitcher and starts pouring lemonade for everyone)

MOTHER

We heard all about that fire you had on your trip over from Chester's people.

FATHER

You sure must have had some experiences, son.

MOTHER

Seems Chester wrote a good bit about it to his family.

HELEN

Wouldn't you like to tell us something about some of your "experiences", too?

VERNON

Chet isn't with me anymore. He was put in the 6th Regiment and I stayed in with the 5th and while I'm sure hoping we'll see each other here again sometime I can't really be sure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HELEN

I'd sure like to know anything you want to tell me Chas.

VERNON

I don't see any of the other boys from home now. Just this one fellow from Oberlin, name of Loveland. He's a pretty fine fellow and he's seen some fighting all right. He was one of the first Marines to get into the trenches. There's a lot of other Ohio boys here, but none I knew before. The front lines are getting closer now and most night's it's pretty hard to sleep or write.

ETHEL

There was lots of mail from France this week.

DOROTHY

You should have seen all the smiles on the faces after their letters came.

VERNON

Would you believe I just got a letter the other day over here that was sent to Paris Island? But it's always good to get some mail from the old home town.

MOTHER

And we surely appreciated the letter we got from you.

HELEN

Mose Feinberg wrote his mother he saw three submarines on his trip over. Can we ask Vernon if he saw any submarines?

FATHER

Ask your mother.

MOTHER

You'll sure have some stories to tell.

VERNON

I see by the newspapers those Germans are trying to get you people along the coast. If you don't watch out, you'll soon be carrying gas masks around over there like we do out here. I'm feeling fine now after two days and two nights of hiking. We'd spent 48 hours trudging along with all we own strapped to our backs. I've got some hardtack and even a little bullybeef so today I feel like a king. (Pause) But I sure wish I could get some of your peach desserts shipped in here just the same.

RALPH

Well Brownie, you can start looking for me soon. I'm working at Griscom-Russell making oil coolers and heaters for Torpedo Boats now, but just as soon as those enlistments open up again I'm going into the Army - and that's no crap this time!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RALPH (cont'd)

The Huns will sure get hell when this draft is passed, Brownie, I tell you we'll go thru 'em like a dose of salts.

DOROTHY

Joe Arthur told Dad what you wrote about those French girls liking the Marines so well.

RALPH

Some swell weather for swimming and haven't I been giving that old lake hell.

HELEN

Why don't you put some of those things in our letters.

RALPH

Hey, buddy, there was this Carnival here not long ago and their first night here was my payday and didn't we all get pickled. I swear, Brownie, I thought my head was gonna burst! There sure are some swell new janes here. Just wait 'til you see 'em. And don't you worry, Buddy, we're saving the best of the gals just for you.

DOROTHY

Are you learning to speak French yet, Chas?

FATHER

Ask if he ever got his wrist watch?

MOTHER

We're still not sure if it ever arrived.

VERNON

I just got back from the front lines.

ETHEL

Little Henry wanted to see your picture today

DOROTHY

He says you've been gone so long he'd forgotten what you looked like.

HELEN

Sometimes I think if Chas doesn't come home soon he won't recognize me at all.

ETHEL

Your brother would never forget what you look like.

HELEN

That might be true for the two of you, but I'm changing everyday.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VERNON

Chet and I both pulled through without a scratch. Believe me, Sherman was right when he said, "War is Hell!." But sometimes I think it's worse than that. We laid in these little holes in the ground where we'd dug ourselves in for 24 hours straight. (Pause) There was some pretty heavy shell fire in those trenches and sometimes, with those shells bursting all around you, well, sometimes you just don't feel as though your life amounts to much. But God was standing guard over me this time and He didn't give my number to the Boche.

MOTHER

Our Helen's sixteenth birthday was yesterday so you see our baby is really growing up.

VERNON

(Very tired) No, not this time.

HELEN

There was a fellow killed at Central Steel last Sunday. He got an electric shock and fell 80 feet. He lived on Muskingham St. but we didn't know him.

MOTHER

Ethel made her a new hat and gave her 50 cents. Dofe gave her the same and I gave her two dollars toward a war saving stamp

VERNON

Received your letter of July 29 when we were camped in the woods. I can't say just where but you should be able to read about it in the papers. We found this underground cave the Germans had used - probably officers from the looks of it. There was still warm water in the pots and some potatoes, too, so we had ourselves some dinner that night. (Pause) I guess we were right behind them.

(VERNON stays frozen)

RALPH

Say Brownie-

HELEN

Billy Noot and another fellow were riding in a Ford car last Saturday night

RALPH

Mike, Jim and I was out with Nellie Moore last week.

HELEN

They were going like crazy when they ran into a telephone pole

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RALPH

Believe me, Brownie, she's got the greatest little figure you've ever seen and she was some --

(RALPH starts to outline a curvy figure when he stops and looks around. Then he begins again)

She was the nicest little lassie you'd ever want to hold.

HELEN

Billy got a bad bump over his eye and was in the hospital two days

RALPH

But talk about scared. When we were all finished, she hinted she had a dose of it, if you know what I mean.

HELEN

Now his face is all black and blue.

RALPH

Well he got pretty scared all right. So, we got Bob Miller to open up the drug store and he give us all a couple shots of Bichloride of Mercury that fixed us up -- just like that!

HELEN

Some people say they were drunk.

MOTHER

Helen?

HELEN

But please, don't tell Mama I told you.

RALPH

Guess I've shot my wad, now Buddy, so you tell Chet and all the others "Hello" from old Ralph. And Brownie? Give every Hun you see an extra shot in the ass for me with compliments from Massillon.

CHET

(The author suggests a snare drum under this entire speech)

The first day of the drive and our Regiment was in that first wave. We gained our objective about noon - but it took us all afternoon to dig in. Towards evening the Germans made a counter attack - and we drove them back again and again. The Huns were dropping 77's all around us and sometimes it seemed they would never stop coming. Suddenly, it got real quiet. Then the 5th Regiment came up and started digging in right in front of us. They were the next ones over the top, all right, and they were happy for the rest. We were pretty hungry and took the break for chow, when who should I meet just then, but Vernon. He was real hungry, too. Hadn't eaten a thing all day. Naturally, I gave him part of mine. The fortunate thing

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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CHET (cont'd)

was just that afternoon I'd found three whole loaves of that French bread and so I had one for each of us and one to split again. I gave this whole bread to him and he was so pleased. Wasn't it lucky I had those two extras? So, there we were, in this hole in France, talking about the folks back home and how we were going to tell them all we had gone through. Then Vernon got word to go forward and dig in. So, we shook hands, I wished him good luck and - then he disappeared. Funny, I still had his extra half in my hands.

(VERNON disappears)

GRACE

Fred Heyman's been gassed. He'd been over the top thirteen times. They think they can still save his eyes. Thank God. Stay well. Love. Grace.

SCENE 3: WAR IS HELL

(Soldiers help VERNON walk, then lay him on a stretcher as he grows weaker.)

ETHEL

Uncle Mortimer wrote they had such a hard trip through those French mountains. It was full of mud and they had to use horses to pull their trucks. He said the boys were so tired when they got to the end of their trip they just laid down in their wet clothes and slept in the road. (PAUSE) They didn't have anything else to wear.

MOTHER

Today is Dad's long shift day and he's home for supper now.

HELEN

He's a heater's helper.

ETHEL

(whispering) Alden had a drink again today at work so they had to let him go.

MOTHER

The Massillon schools have been closed for the past two weeks on account of that Spanish flu.

HELEN

And the City hospital's all filled up, too.

ETHEL

Poor Alden. We don't know what he will do now.

MOTHER

What do you suppose happens to your mail? Chester Archibald wrote his Mother that you and he were in the same battle and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER (cont'd)

you were all right then. That was the first letter she'd gotten from Chester in eleven weeks. Bucky Weikert is in a hospital and his mother said he was back a long way from the firing line. (Pause) What do you suppose happens to your mail?

ETHEL

(ETHEL gets letter from the mailbox)

October 15. Dear Mother & all, I am in the hospital - but I'm OK. I was hit in the thigh by a machine gun bullet, but please don't worry. I was hit October fourth but I'm getting along pretty well now. I will write more later, hoping you are well, I am your loving son - Oh! Please telephone Grace and tell her I've been wounded. Answer soon. C.V.Brown., US Army Hospital #50

MOTHER

After a long and anxious wait, your letter arrived this morning telling of your being wounded. (Pause) It was a shock, and then I began to be glad that it wasn't worse. I was so glad to see the words in your own writing and I only wish I could help take care of you, too. It would be such a pleasure to me after all your hardships, but if what they say about the nurses over there is true, you are in good hands. Grace Hering had just called to see if I was going to send you a Christmas box. She wanted to put a little package in for you. And then this letter came and Dorothy called her right back. She said she would write and I'm sure she will. She's such a nice young girl. Sleep well son. We think of you everyday.

GRACE

I saw little Henry Jones yesterday. He said he was going to give you a kiss when you got home. (Pause) That makes two of us.

SCHOOL GIRL

Dear Private Brown. I am writing to you on behalf of the members of the Wesley Methodist Sunday School. We have read in the Independent of your being wounded in action.

GRACE

Ralph Bowers just wrote me from Camp Knox.

SCHOOL GIRL

We wish to express our appreciation for the great sacrifices you have made in behalf of your Country and humanity in general.

GRACE

He still doesn't know you're wounded but I promise to write to him this afternoon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER

It's been four weeks since I've heard from you.

SCHOOL GIRL

Though it is generally the custom of our Sunday School to send flowers to members who are sick....

MOTHER

Pa Crookston died Tuesday. He'd worked that day and seemed just fine. Then he took a pain around the heart and within fifteen minutes he was a corpse. We'd just been up to see them last Sunday.

SCHOOL GIRL

...because of this special circumstance you will find a money order for two dollars. Please accept this in place of the flowers and use it for whatever you wish.

MOTHER

You must know how anxious we are to hear from you.

SCHOOL GIRL

We all hope it is some consolation to you to know what a high estimate your community places on your service. Many of us remember you and all of us pray for your safe return. Your friends at the Wesley Methodist Sunday School.

MOTHER

Dad and I are going to see Ma Crookston. Dad has got to be a heater's helper - did I tell you that before?

FATHER

I've started this letter to you son. I'm sorry I've taken so long to write one myself, but you know how anxious we are to have you home.

MINISTER

May God watch over you until you return to us, son.

GRACE

Sara Jones is expecting to go to France any day now and Pauline Harrison, too. Are the nurses there good to you?

ETHEL

There's talk of peace everyday now.

GRACE

Ralph Bowers has been made a Sergeant. Have you heard from him yet? Why don't we hear from you?

DOROTHY

And not sending anymore boys to the camps.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRACE
 Everyone says peace is near.
 (overlapping)

DOROTHY
 Do you think so?

GRACE
 I hope so.

ETHEL
 What have you heard?

DOROTHY/GRACE/ETHEL
 Lots of love.

DOROTHY
 Dorothy.

GRACE
 Grace.

ETHEL
 Ethel.

ROY
 Massillon had a great parade last week. Stirred up lots of
 enthusiasm for that fourth Liberty loan.

GRACE
 Charles? John Evans was killed.

ROY
 (waving his newspaper into the air)
 In every paper they speak of the bravery of our American
 boys.

DOROTHY
 Chester Archibald had a finger hit with shrapnel.

GRACE
 I think about you all the time.

MOTHER
 It's been five weeks since I've had a letter. Leda Albright
 got a letter from Chester Potts this week saying he'd come
 out of his second fight all right.

GRACE
 I pray every night you are well.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER

Doc Shertzer told of seeing you and about that fire you had on the trip over. You never wrote us about that. We have our house cleaning done now. Dofe is making herself a blue silk dress and Ethel's making new hats for the whole Brown family. Are you healed up yet? Edna Johnson has a new baby. Uncle Mortimer wrote he had a bad cold and Aunt Emma 's foot isn't well enough for her to come here yet. Why don't we hear from you, son?

ROY

It looks like the end might not be far away. The weather's been wonderful for school and football, but we couldn't have either one. Otherwise, Chas, this teaching's not so bad at all. Maybe you should think about it yourself. You're a smart fellow and more than just good with your hands. That's all for now. Your friend. Roy Hartung.

DOROTHY

They think the flu's under control now.

HELEN

We heard they were taking four or five dead out every morning.

GRACE

Ralph Bowers had the flu but he's fine now and he said he should be coming overseas any day now.

ETHEL

Dorothy Dillon's husband from Chicago was killed and a Maier boy had his foot shot off.

GRACE

Leo Converse is at Camp Sherman. They just buried his brother, Sam.

MOTHER

I enclose a dollar and Helen sends you a stick of gum.

DOROTHY

It looks by the papers as if it can't last much longer.

(Sound of victory bells. Everyone is jumping up and down, dancing, the soldiers shake their heads as they cover VERNON's face with the blanket and carry out the body.)

ROY

This has been the greatest day in the history of Massillon.

GRACE

The Armistice has finally come!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROY

News of the signing reached us early this morning.

GRACE

By 5:30 whistles were blowing and bells ringing for more than an hour.

ROY

By noon there was a big parade downtown and a neverending stream of crowds filling the city.

GRACE

It's evening now and even from here you can still hear them celebrating downtown.

ROY

It's a wonderful sound, Buddy.

GRACE

At last, dear Vernon, it's the sound of peace.

MOTHER

Dad has missed you so much, son. Sometimes it seemed as if he would never get over your going away. But now peace has come, and he's looking forward to the time when you'll come home. He talks about you all the time. (pause) Little Henry Jones called to me the other day, "The war's over, Mrs. Brown," he says, "and now Vernon will be coming home." He is some sweet boy, all right, some sweet boy. (pause) Tell me, son, have you gotten all my letters. I've sent one every week since you've been gone and this is the 6th dollar I've put in, too. Why don't you answer.

ROY

By the way Chas - we're getting two of three of those new lathes I told you about....six feet between centers. I know you were thinking that this might be the thing you could really do, and wait 'til you see these beauties. In fact, they're putting them in next month so I'm saving a place for you right next to me. I remember how you talked about those lathes and I expect as soon as you get back you'll want to do some turning yourself.

MOTHER

It's been over six weeks now since we've heard a word from you son, and sometimes I think I just can't stand it much longer... (Pause) Hope this letter finds you well, as it leaves us all well, too. Wherever you are right now, Love Mother and all of us back home.

(Doorbell rings. Ethel opens a telegram)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ETHEL

November 16, 1918, Lena M Brown, 1202 Duncan Street, Massillon Ohio. Deeply Regret to inform you Message from Abroad states Private Charles V. Brown died on October Twenty-fourth from wounds received in action. Particulars to follow. Accept my heartfelt sympathy in your loss of one who nobly gave his life in the service of his country. Charles G. Long, Brigadier General.

CHET

That day when we shared that French bread was truly the last I ever saw of him until I got this letter from Grace telling of his death. I hope there's been some mistake.

DOROTHY

The American Red Cross sends you this photograph of the grave of Charles B. Brown - an American Soldier who gave his life for his country.

ETHEL

Dofe, you said "B" Brown.

DOROTHY SC

It's on the picture. Charles B. Brown.

ETHEL

The name on the picture says "B." Brown Mama.

HELEN

But Chas is Vernon Brown.

ETHEL

That's right Helen.

HELEN

It's the wrong name Mama.

DOFE

Charles B. Brown, Mama, it's the wrong name.
(the girls run off waving the photo)

SCENE 4: DEATH & REMEMBRANCE

PHEBE LONG

What can I say, dear Lena, to heal your broken hearts. This certainly wouldn't be the first time the government's made a mistake, but surely if there is anything to be learned in France, our dear brother Mortimer will find it.

MORTIMER

Of course I shall answer your questions dear Sister, just as quickly as I can get myself to that hospital.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHEBE LONG

Now there is peace, it makes me even sadder to think of the brave boys who will never come home.

MIRIAM

Word has just come that my friends have been called upon to give their only son to their country. I grieved that my friends were called upon to make this sacrifice and yet I thrilled at the thought that when his sacrifice came, the boy was weighed in the balance and was not found wanting.

MORTIMER

It's cold in France now, you can hear the snow crackling under your feet when you walk. I took the train to Vernon's hospital but I had to stop and spend the night in Pouilley. Since it was late and I needed a place to sleep, I hunted up this MP - and he took me to the officers Club, but they'd already gone to bed. The MP thought we might find a room at this cafe, but my heart took a tumble when the woman told the MP "NO". Then I asked to talk to her directly and I might say right here and now that it makes my arms sore to speak French, but then after I parley - vued with her a while, she smiled at me and said - "Oui, Oui" Turns out she thought the MP was asking for cognac! Some language, that French, Huh? Oui, Oui. Oui, Oui, Oui.

PHEBE LONG

I have worried and cried so many tears over this war that they almost refuse to start. And although my own sweet boys were too old to go, I still have a Mother's heart.

MIRIAM

Be proud, oh, Mother dear, that you gave birth to one who lived to enter such a fight!

MORTIMER

I had a lovely bed though I'm sorry to say the poor enlisted man seldom gets such fine quarters. I haven't always had heat but seldom any light except a candle, but tonight I have this lovely room, fine bed, good stove, plenty to eat, so the only thing on earth a man should wish for is to be near his dear relatives and friends.

PHEBE LONG

I received a letter from Vernon before he went on to the battlefield and one just before he left for France back in May. I answered the one, but the other made me so sad I couldn't write back.

MORTIMER

I'm ashamed to say I never knew my nephew had any other name but Vernon, and since you'd never given me his identification number or organization, I still had hope he might be alive. I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MORTIMER

told the Sergeant that my Brown, like the one in the telegram, had been hit by a machine gun too, and though the initial on this record was "B", this poor soldier had died exactly the way I had imagined our Vernon had. (Pause) Finally I asked what I should have in the first place - and his home address came back 1202 Duncan Street, Massillon, Ohio It was then for the first time that I was sure this boy was truly your beloved son, Vernon. And that even though you had hoped he was still alive, he was truly gone forever.

PHEBE LONG

Truly, Sister, I never thought for a moment I wouldn't see dear Vernon again, Or I would have come to Massillon last winter before he volunteered. But that's the way it is in this life. We can't really count on anything, though someday, perhaps, you may see this was all for the best. We must believe that...always.

MORTIMER

Later, I asked for transportation to the cemetery and the Sergeant took me to the grave. His identification cross was still on the grave head. I can't for the life of me see how they made that mistake. It was so plainly marked Charles V.

PHEBE LONG

I'm trying to get my affairs in order so I can come out soon.(Pause) I was so in hopes that Vernon would get home and we could all have a nice visit.

ROY

Mr. and Mrs. Brown, when I received that terribly sad news about my friend Vernon being wounded I could hardly go on...and then when I heard he was really dead.- I couldn't help but cry and then I just had to sit down and write you this letter. I was always hoping there was some mistake. Even the Marines can make a mistake.

MORTIMER

I took two pictures of the grave. As soon as these are developed I will send you one.

MIRIAM

Oh, Mother, Father and sisters, what a glorious gift has been yours. Never shall you be called upon to hang your heads because your boy did not heed the call of his country; did not place himself between Mother and sister and the lust of the Huns!

ROY

You and many other parents will have cause to remember these days by that empty place at the table and that pain in their heart knowing their boy won't be marching home with the others.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MIRIAM

To you has been given the star - pure and gold- which proclaims to all the world that this home gave an only son that you may live and that millions yet unborn might enjoy the liberties of a world forever free. I, for one, fully realize that your son along with thousands of others, made the Supreme Sacrifice that I might live in security. He fought that the womanhood of the world might be protected. And I thank God your son was there to place his body as a living shield between me and the Huns and say, "They shall not pass.!" Your friend who understands, Miriam Johnson.

MORTIMER

All that hot air about dying for one's country in some glorious cause doesn't appeal to me a lick. Sometimes I think I'm not very patriotic at all.

ROY

But I truly believe, Mr. and Mrs. Brown, that Vernon met his death with a smile on his face, knowing that the cause for humanity, had practically been accomplished. After all, that was why he went.

MORTIMER

This is the cold blooded part of war - to see all those wounded men as they were brought down the hill to our dressing station - the flower of American manhood and most of them so young, just like your own sweet boy. Well, I've often wondered just how I would have felt and acted at their age.

ROY

I've lost two cousins and now Vernon. I shall always remember him. Indeed, I can hardly believe he's gone. He was my friend, tried and true and I will miss him in the years to come. Sincerely, Roy Hartung.

MORTIMER

If you want him home, just come right out and say so good and strong and if you don't know, get down and have a good prayer and if you stay there long enough, I know you will decide one way or the other. But if you decided to have his body brought to America, dear Sister, you must understand that the coffin could not be opened, and while the system the Army has is wonderful, there is always that uncertain feeling, whether by some error that the tag might have been misplaced or a thousand other things that could go wrong that this body, well this body could be just a soldier who died for his country and nothing more or less than that. I hope you understand what I am saying and I wish I could write you a real honest to goodness sympathetic letter such as I feel, but I'm just like my father and you knew his disposition well. I have tried my best to tell you everything I know. The rest is up to God.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RALPH

Brownie? What can I say. He was a helluva of guy. A heck of a friend. A real pal. What can I say? It's some loss all right. I mean I never got there myself and now...what can I say except...I'm sorry.

SCENE 5: HOME GOING

(Train whistle. A hymn such as *A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD* is playing. Mourners start to arrive carrying benches. Entire stage may again be used during the funeral which should involve the audience as much as possible)

VOICE OVER

Remains of the late Charles Brown forwarded tonight, January 10, 1921, nine-thirty-five PM American Railway Express leaving New York on train number ninety-five, Pennsylvania Railroad, Charles should arrive destination, Massillon, Ohio ten AM January 11.

(After everyone else is on stage, the family comes on and then the MINISTER.)

MINISTER

Let us all rise.

(Body brought in front of family. Casket should be draped in American flag. The MINISTER begins to sing and the others join in)

A mighty fortress is our God.
A bulwark never failing.
Our helper He amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
O come, let us sing unto the Lord.

SOPRANO

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty.
Early in the morning our songs will rise to thee.

MINISTER

Please be seated. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, And be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; That the King of Glory may come in.

SOPRANO

Holy, Holy, Holy, All the Saints Adore Thee.
Casting down their glassy crown around the glassy sea.

MINISTER

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,
but have not love, I am become sounding brass,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MINISTER

or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift
of prophecy, and understand all mysteries,
and all knowledge; and if I have all faith,
so that I could remove mountains,
and have not love, I am nothing.

ALL

Beareth all things,

MINISTER

Believeth all things,

ALL

Hopeth all things,

MINISTER

Endureth all things...
When I was a child, I spake as a child,
I understood as a child, I thought as a child;
But when I became a man, I put away childish things.
For now we see through a glass darkly;

ALL

But then shall we see face to face:

MINISTER

Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.

ALL

And now abideth faith, hope, love,

MINISTER

These three, but the greatest of these is love.

(Congregation leaves stage after giving comfort
to the family. Sisters remain with parents and
CHET moves to place his hands on the coffin).

SOPRANO

Abide with me, Fast falls the eventide. The darkness deepens,
Lord with me abide...when other helpers fail and comforts
flee. Help of the helpless, Oh, abide with me.

CHET

During the time I have known Vernon we had become great
friends and I was very much attached to him. The night before
he received his fatal wound, I had a long talk with him. He
seemed to be in the best of spirits and we talked of home and
what we were going to do when we returned. (pause) We wonder
why these things are but still they must be, for they are
controlled by one, who's power we do not question and who is
all supreme.

(MOTHER and FATHER comfort CHET who then leaves
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHET (cont'd)

with the other sisters. MOM and FATHER remain at the coffin as OLD HELEN moves past them unseen. The author suggests that 'TIL WE MEET AGAIN is played under OLD HELEN's monologue)

OLD HELEN

Chet Potts came back alive, though he felt pretty terrible about being the last one to see my brother alive. Sometimes it seemed he almost felt responsible for Vernon's dying, as if his joining up had been Chet's idea in the first place. He even named his son Chester Vernon Potts as a tribute, and though we didn't understand much about it then, it seems to happen sometimes to the ones who are left behind. So much to ask for ones so young to bear. And even those much older. My sisters and I only knew our brother was gone, and all the electric lights of the world could never brighten that dark spot he left behind. Oh, Ethel went off to teach art in New Jersey. She never married and came back home to Ohio in '47 when she had the cancer. Mother and Father were gone five years by then. Mother died in March of '42 and father followed her two months later.

(MOM and FATHER cross the path of OLD HELEN as she is left alone on stage with the coffin.)

Dad never did seem the same after Vernon died and though Mother tried to carry on as usual, her eyes were often wet and distant. Dofe married and taught music in the public schools 'til '62. I married too, and made a very good life here in Massillon with my husband, warm friends and dear neighbors. But I'm old now - and alone. Dofe died in '77 and left me with these family treasures - a box of letters marked, "Deceased, return to family", pins, flags and even those bullets he sent. Things my Mother saved that helped her bear that terrible emptiness we could never fill. My brother fought that Great War thinking his fighting then would somehow keep others from ever having to go again - but he died and they still keep going. Even now. My Mother fought to bring Charles home and made us promise to pass these things on so that the dying would be remembered. That he would be remembered. "The War to End All Wars" wasn't the last one - anyone can read that much in the papers. Now it seems only a few of us can even remember those few months in 1918 - too many wars and boys gone since (Pause) But now that you've been here and heard all this -- well, just perhaps you'll remember him and why he died too.

(OLD HELEN exits. There is a spotlight on the coffin and then a black out)

Play ends.