

# A QUIET PLACE

Peggy Boléat

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‘Every book is, in an intimate sense, a circular letter to the friends of him who writes it. They alone take his meaning; they find private messages, assurances of love, and expressions of gratitude, dropped for them in every corner.’

*Robert Louis Stevenson*

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## **A QUIET PLACE**

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## CONTENTS

Preface	xiii
Introduction	1
PART ONE	
A Little History	5
Declaration of War	21
Evacuation	24
Occupation	32
PART TWO	
General Hospital	41
Overdale 'B' Ward	59
Top Cubicles	98
Les Vaux	115
PART THREE	
Frémont	139
Compiègne	144
Lunch at the Aurora	151
Biberach	155
Invasion	160
Frémont	165
Siege	170
Cushions for the yacht 'Aphrodite'	176
Biberach	182
Liberation	186
Reunion	189
Bibliography	193

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In particular, I wish to thank my sons David and Richard, without whose encouragement and practical help publication of this book would have been delayed, perhaps indefinitely.

I would also like to thank Mrs Baker (Nurse Butlin) for valuable information on aspects of Overdale unknown to me.

*Cover illustration by Eric Gregory.*

**For Paul**



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## PREFACE

Jersey was a pleasant place in which to live in the nineteen thirties. The largest of the Channel Islands, twelve miles by seven at its greatest breadth, it had a population of 50,000. The Island's economy was firmly based on agriculture, mainly the growing of early potatoes, followed by tomatoes and with some flowers. Tourism played a small, though not inconsiderable part.

The Island was beautiful. It still is. Its beaches, washed clean by spring tides, are among the finest in Europe. Bladder campion (*silene maritima*) and thrift (*armeria maritima*) throng the cliff tops in late spring and the world renowned Jersey cattle graze lush pastures.

At present, Jersey's population is over 80,000. Tourism has become an industry and the finance sector flourishes. Prosperity has changed peoples' aspirations and this is clearly shown in family life. The barbecue beside the pool has superseded the picnic on the beach and the child playing a computer game doesn't even know what a daisy chain looks like.

In part, my story concerns the two years from midsummer 1941 to midsummer 1943 when I was a patient in hospital with tuberculosis during the German occupation of the Channel Islands. It is, to my knowledge, a unique personal account from an unusual and an oblique viewpoint; that of the patient, cushioned and sheltered from the reality of life, but having the

## PREFACE

heightened sensibility to extract every nuance from the day-to-day living that presented itself.

I have no faith in the security of diaries. They tend to fall into unwanted hands and if one is constantly looking over one's shoulder nothing of worth will ever be put down. Indeed, I have found no need of them. My recollections are vivid; only the chronology may at times be at fault and so, rather than be casual about attributing dates, I have used an asterisk to indicate the passage of time.

Every person in my story is a real person and no-one has been given a fictitious name. I remember them all, many with affection. Should there be those who perhaps would have preferred to remain anonymous, I beg their indulgence.

Peggy Boléat  
St Brelade  
Jersey, Channel Islands  
1993

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## INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago and up until the Second World War, tuberculosis was prevalent in England and perhaps more so in the Channel Islands. It was infectious and passed readily among large families in close conditions. Houses built of granite were notoriously damp, and this was an added factor in the spread of the disease.

Tuberculosis (TB) is a wasting disease, the lungs being mostly affected. Patients suffered a decline and in many cases, premature death. Nearly all were young, often in their teens. To a lesser extent, bones and joints were affected, with crippling results. It is an established fact that, prior to 1940, tuberculosis of the bones and joints was mostly due to tubercule bacilli derived from milk. Milk was unpasteurised and not cleanly treated.

In Jersey during the German Occupation from 1941 to 1945, there were just over 50 new cases each year, approximately 50 per cent above the level for the ten years leading up to the War. Figures are, however, an unsafe indication as to the incidence of a disease in a community. In Jersey, the population dropped from 50,000 to 40,000 in the months leading up to the outbreak of war. Those leaving the Island, in many cases to join the armed forces, were fit adults. Those remaining may have presented a higher risk. Malnutrition and lack of fuel also undoubtedly played their part.

## INTRODUCTION

Treatment in the main consisted of bed rest, good food and an abundance of fresh air. There was no medication except for food supplements, for example fish liver oil.

In orthopaedic cases, the joint or limb affected was immobilised by being placed in a plaster cast. In pulmonary cases a lung could be collapsed temporarily by surgical means (artificial pneumothorax) to allow it to rest, or even permanently by severing the phrenic nerve. These treatments were, however, not always successful.

Tuberculosis is not the menace it once was, although sporadic outbreaks do occur. Prevention is by BCG vaccination, and those suffering from tuberculosis are successfully treated with drugs.

# PART ONE

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## A Little History

It was an institution in my family that, on the first Sunday in September, blackberries would be picked for the making of bramble jelly. A picnic was always arranged, perhaps to encourage the lazy. It was not to be all hard work.

Summers of distant memory are always golden. The summer of 1935 was no exception, but the day of the picnic stands out as a turning point, or a beginning if you like, and what would have been a distant memory comes sharply into focus.

The bus, which conveniently stopped at our front door in St Mark's Road, took us to St Catherine's Bay on Jersey's east coast. This was a wide and shallow bay with several small rocky coves along its length, and bounded at its extremity by a breakwater running straight out to sea for half a mile. This long arm of the breakwater was originally intended to form part of a naval base, defensive against the French. It was funded by the British Government and work was started in 1847. A second arm farther down the coast never progressed very far and work was abandoned in 1852. By then, relations with the French had improved and it was also realised that, besides being unable to provide a deep water anchorage, the harbour was badly sited for protecting merchantmen and men o' war. St Catherine's breakwater became a folly, but was so elegant in its structure and design that it fitted

## A LITTLE HISTORY

comfortably into peoples' minds as well as into the landscape.

The coast road, following the line of the bay, ended where the breakwater began. A slipway curved down to the sea, providing a small jetty. The bus stopped there. It could go no farther.

Brambles flourished on the slopes around this area of the bay. Robust, thorny bushes, and still green, they were in vivid contrast to the bleached and brittle grass of late summer which skirted and lapped them as a sea. The grass was alive with crickets. They hopped in all directions at our approach. Small orange butterflies made less of a commotion.

From the top of the slopes, St Catherine's Bay, protected by its breakwater, looked as remote and as self-contained as a water colour painting; a painting within which a cottage tumbling into ruins made the foreground, and beyond which two or three fishing boats were placed, with care and delicacy, onto a placid sea. A milkiness of sea and sky suggested coldness in the upper atmosphere and a change of season.

After the picnic lunch, everybody picked blackberries. Conversations lapsed as baskets filled. It was late afternoon when we walked downhill towards the jetty and the empty bus waiting there.

On the slopes the crickets had already begun their evening chorus.

\*

A week later, I was sitting in the doctor's waiting room. A persistent pain had developed in my right buttock and down my leg. My step-mother, Ruby, accompanied me. I was thirteen.

## A LITTLE HISTORY

The doctor seemed unimpressed. I looked particularly healthy. 'Had I perhaps been over-exercising?' he asked, and the family picnic of the previous week was reviewed. The doctor thought my discomfort was most likely due to muscle strain and prescribed rest and hot baths. The rest and the hot baths had little effect, and by the end of the second week, when I was unable to move because of the severity of the pain, I was transferred to a small hospital called the 'Dispensary' in St Helier, Jersey's capital. No treatment was given, and over several weeks I gradually recovered. I walked carefully and sometimes with a noticeable limp.

\*

It was while I was a patient at the Dispensary that the family left the house in St Mark's road, and bought another, to be called 'Kenton'. The new house was in the last stages of completion, and while the work was being carried out we lived at the Bristol Hotel; we being my father, Ruby, my half brother Michael and myself.

The Bristol was run as a private hotel and had belonged to Ruby's mother, Mrs Theresa Marks, since the early nineteen twenties. The name 'Bristol Hotel' has a high class ring to it, and it is true that at one time so much prestige was attached to the name that to ask for the best hotel in town was synonymous to asking the way to the Bristol Hotel or, if on the continent, Le Bristol. Whether the Bristol Hotel in St Helier ever fulfilled such a category can only be guessed at. In the nineteen thirties, when I was a child of nine or ten, the hotel apart from its two bars was, in all respects, an oversized family house. The summer visitors who flocked to the Bristol Hotel year after year were Mrs Mark's daughters and their respective families, as well as numerous aunts,

cousins and other relations with an indistinct claim to kinship, who could only be classed as hangers-on. Our family, living in Jersey, were the most frequent visitors of all.

The Bristol was a sizable property, making an importance of the corner of Kensington Place where it opened on to the Esplanade and the sea front. The building curved in a bold arc, the tall windows in the immense drawing room on the first floor having superb views of St Aubin's Bay and Elizabeth Castle. Downstairs on Kensington Place was the public bar and round the corner facing the Esplanade was a lounge bar which was called the Buffet, although no food was ever served there. The Buffet was large and airy with conservatory type windows along facing sides. French doors opened on to the Buffet garden, where the green painted cast-iron tables and chairs were set on the gravel in an orderly fashion. The garden walls were thick with Virginia creeper entwined with honeysuckle that for years and years had been allowed to go its own sweet way. In the evening a few fairy lights twinkled among the leaves; just a few, so as not to dispel the cool intimacy of the garden. The light streaming through the open Buffet doors was sufficient illumination on sultry summer nights.

I wonder now from what source the Bristol generated its income, apart from the two bars. Mrs Marks could be generous to a fault. Her bar snacks must have been among the best in the Island. I helped to make them. The ham was cut in lavish slices from home cooked gammons to fill rolls which were spread with yellow Jersey butter just as lavishly. The ham rolls were sold across the counter of the public bar and bought by the packers, graders and coopers in the warehouses along the Esplanade.

## A LITTLE HISTORY

Mrs Marks, though of small stature, was an upright figure. Her manner was autocratic. To my young eyes she was very much the grande dame. I called her 'Gran' although she was not my grandmother. Our relationship could be said to be harmonious, if a little distant.

I view the thirties as a time of careless pleasure, when summers seemed to last forever; and I believe it was so for the adults, even at a time when public and private faces were so very distinct. Although we lived in St Marks Road then, much of each summer was spent at the Bristol in this holiday atmosphere. The hotel would be full of visitors, there were impressive games of poker in the drawing room, and good living in the fine suppers cooked by Gran in the Jewish tradition.

The children, and I was one of them, were largely ignored, which we considered a totally satisfying state of affairs. As long as we turned up for meals our whereabouts were never questioned. The town, the harbours and the beaches were all at our disposal. We never got into serious mischief because we seldom had more than one penny each for an ice-cream cornet. Money did not concern us. We led an arcane existence, while at the same time conforming to the good manners demanded of all children. We were not unloved but we did not constantly fill the thoughts of our parents. Like cherished pets to-day, we were made much of when we appeared and forgotten, so we hoped, when we were absent.

We were not always absent. The hotel itself had possibilities. The Buffet garden, when closed to the public, became the centre for imaginative games which usually involved a re-assembly of the chairs and tables; there was also a mean little yard opening off the kitchens, offering consolation for those who felt moody; the well

blistered paint on the old door witness to many finger scratchings.

\*

The summer of 1935 was past, but not lamented. Children only look forward and are not interested in nostalgia.

I was thirteen, and it was November. The visitors had departed, the folding chairs were tidily stacked in the Buffet garden and the Buffet itself was open for fewer hours during the day. I was convalescing, and I made the Buffet my own during the times when it was closed to the public. The atmosphere was warm and dry – it was to a large extent a sun lounge. Leather covered chesterfields stood side by side under the windows facing the Esplanade and ranged in front were the coffee tables of to-day. Their racks held bound copies of the Illustrated London News. I had the Buffet to myself. Out of season space was never at a premium at the Bristol.

I was off school for the whole of the autumn term. I could not walk far and had had a fall since leaving the Dispensary. I wandered around the hotel nursing the pain in my hip, or settled more comfortably in the Buffet and read the Illustrated London News, despite its heavy going. There were no other books. It was a Victorian idea that to be seen reading books during the day was a sign of sloth. Perhaps Gran subscribed to this. As it was, I had a feeling that I was only indulged until I was fit again.

I did not complain of physical discomfort, reversing the image of the adults who made no comment on my condition. I assumed that my recovery would take time and, in comparison with my situation at the Dispensary, I was certainly improved.

In my restlessness I climbed the stairs to the servants rooms above the kitchens. There were no live-in servants at that time and the two rooms were used as box rooms. They had never been a part of childrens' games, our interest had only been in the door at the foot of the stairs which masqueraded as a cupboard between kitchen and scullery.

The flat-topped trunk in a corner of one of the rooms excited no especial curiosity, but in my ennui I attempted to raise the lid. It needed some persuasion, the corners seemingly welded into position while the centre sagged heavily. At last, the lid of the trunk fell back; on what was little less than a revelation.

The trunk was completely full of paperback books. There must have been a hundred at the very least. They were packed so tightly and evenly that, for a brief moment, their glossy covers were as a kaleidoscope in their colour and variety.

The paperbacks turned out to be, for the most part, detective stories, 'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes' and 'Bulldog Drummond' to name but two. There were also a few romances. These I set aside. I was not interested in romance.

I pondered on why the books were there. Were they part of a job lot, later to be sold in the bar? And now forgotten? It would not do to jog anyone's memory. That evening I took 'Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back' to bed with me and read myself into comfort, and sleep.

As the weeks passed my discomfort became less and my walking improved. Comments on my posture were fewer.

Kenton was ready and we moved into it. In January I was back at school.

Compared with medical practice to-day, my treatment up until this time would seem to have been less than

## A LITTLE HISTORY

adequate. On being discharged from the Dispensary there were no follow-up visits that I can recall, either to the Dispensary or to our family doctor. It was accepted that I was recovering from sciatica.

It was all a long time ago. It was a time when a patient would have to summon up the courage before asking the doctor for a second opinion. Many doctors reacted to this as if their skill were in question. Doctors pontificated and patients humbly took their advice, or otherwise. It was unknown for a doctor to discuss with a patient the nature of his or her disease. These days, if one can add humour to discomfort, it seems almost obligatory to read up on one's presumed ailment before a consultation.

In fairness, much less was known about disease and, while modern diagnostic procedures were lacking, the doctor of the thirties applied the knowledge of the time together with a certain mystique and a 'bedside manner'. The latter was invaluable. So it is to-day.

It now seems incredible, but, even five years later when I was to enter hospital with TB I had no understanding of my disease, and when I was discharged over two years later I was equally uninformed.

\*

I was a pupil at the Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, simply known as the Convent FCJ, in David Place, St Helier. Apart from being excused games because of the risk of a fall, I seldom missed classes.

In the spring of 1936, when I was fourteen, the class sat the examination known as Oxford Junior. It was obligatory to take all subjects, namely English Language, English Literature, Composition, English Grammar,

French (written and oral), Arithmetic, Geography, History, Geometry and Algebra. Ruby, no doubt wanting me to do well, made the mistake of asking Reverend Mother if I might be provided with a cushion. To be different from others in certain respects was acceptable, but to be seen to be different I found deeply shaming. I am surprised that I was able to focus any proper attention on these examinations, considering the anguish caused by the hated cushion, but when the results became known I had not done so badly after all.

I left the Convent at fifteen, without any particular ambition. Careers were not seriously discussed in the thirties, either in school or at home. The taking of a job, and in particular a secretarial job, was often seen to be no more than the practical use of an interval before marriage.

I began an eighteen months' course at Miss Markey's School of Shorthand and Typewriting, in Bond Street, St Helier. Both its title and its location would surely deceive the reader. Bond Street, more of a lane than a street, ran between Mulcaster Street and Conway Street. On its south side stood a row of tall, narrow houses. On the north side, a row of similar houses was broken by railings defining the boundary of the Town Church. Miss Markey's school occupied one room only on the top floor of one of the houses facing the Town Church, its approach directly off the pavement and up two steep flights of stairs.

The fact that Miss Markey had the reputation of being a good teacher was sufficient. The classroom, no more than twelve feet square, accommodated six students at one time. Battered Underwood typewriters stood on improvised desks, and note books and well used manuals of Pitman's Shorthand were stacked on the mantelpiece. The decoration overall was a dull brown, even to the

## A LITTLE HISTORY

linoleum on the floor. This was hardly noticed as we were inured to the browns and heavy greens which served to identify any room having even a remote public function. Two tall sash windows overlooked the environs of the Town Church, and though affording a pleasant view, ensured that the classroom retained a certain chill even in summer.

The winter of 1937/38 was cold. On such days a 'Valor' portable paraffin heater was brought into the classroom. This heater was always called by name in order to propitiate the djinn that ruled over it; it saved laying the blame elsewhere for its shortcomings. This type of heater, or stove, was basically an upright metal cylinder on legs. Black and shiny, its top, which could act as a hotplate, had decorative perforations in the manner of a paper doily. A window on its side, lined with red perspex, gave an illusion of expansive warmth but it was no more than that. Our fingers remained partially numb although we were grateful for the Valor's presence. But the djinn could turn nasty at a whim, tainting the air with fumes as smoke rose through the perforations of the hotplate with speed and devastation. The djinn could also sulk. A similar heater was called 'Aladdin' but magic, as we know, is not so easily tamed.

The danger of fire from having a freestanding heater in a crowded room was not remotely considered, though I view it now as awesome.

Miss Markey owned an alsatian dog called Rex. He sometimes roamed the classroom between the desks, the paraffin heater and the moving figure of Miss Markey as, bulky in her tweeds, she supervised each student's work. Rex was generally sent downstairs and outside for a walk while classes were in progress, but in fact, within five minutes, he had sidled into the office of the Jersey Farmers Union on the ground floor, where they kept a

roaring fire. On his return upstairs he gave a convincing display, by shaking himself and rolling on the mat, of having endured rain, hail and sleet. Miss Markey called him 'good dog' and never put a hand on his coat to feel if it were wet or dry.

As a student I was encouraged to take up temporary jobs while in training, now called work experience. One of my temporary jobs was for two weeks at the offices of Barton, Mayhew & Co, Chartered Accountants at No 16 Hill Street, St Helier, as a holiday replacement. In the following summer of 1939 I was again offered the holiday replacement job, and at the end of my fortnight was asked if I would like to join the firm. I may have felt a little flattered at being sought after, but in reality, now that war looked to be imminent, all firms were retaining as many of their staff as possible.

I had completed my training and passed the examinations set by the Chamber of Commerce. I received certificates for typing at forty words per minute and for taking dictation at one hundred words per minute and afterwards transcribing it.

I accepted the job of shorthand-typist without any consideration of other opportunities. I liked the work, despite the conditions being only one step away from those of Bond Street. In the general office brown paint was, once again, considered decoration enough, and brown linoleum covered the floor. A wooden counter ran from end to end sectioning off the working area, which was dominated by a Dickensian desk of large dimensions with sloping sides. Clerks were provided with high stools. Black metal deed boxes, placed one upon the other almost to the ceiling, occupied one end of the office; at the other was what could be classed as a small sitting room grate with overmantle. In winter, a fire blossomed in it, jealous of its heat. There were two sash windows

facing the street, opaque for half their height with the words 'Barton, Mayhew & Co, Accountants and Auditors' heavily engraved in black.

Betty Fearon, secretary and shorthand-typist and whose job I had understudied, worked at the more public end of the office. A working space was made for me between the great desk and below the precipice of deed boxes, whose shiny black sides glinted with highlights only in their upper reaches. I once overheard myself described as 'little Miss Still'. I was not little but, working in my cul-de-sac, I was as lost to view as the beetle tapping against the wall.

When I joined Barton, Mayhew & Co in 1939 I was sixteen. There was then a tremendous gulf between junior and senior staff. You could say that one group was above the notice of the other, and the other was below it. The war was to force a change, and our interdependence probably began it.

For as long as I worked at Barton, Mayhew & Co I was never addressed other than Miss Still, and I would not have called Mr Fairlie 'Graeme', or even thought to try out the sound of it on my tongue; but by 1944, despite such formalities, a more relaxed attitude had come into being. With a wartime staff reduced to six it might have been thought inevitable. Not at all. It was the times that were changing.

Ernest Palmer Hellyer, MBE, Chartered Accountant always known as EPH in the office, was perhaps in his late forties. Not tall and a trifle rotund, his thinning hair must once have been auburn. He had a small moustache, and his fair complexion had attained a certain ruddiness. He favoured tweed suits in rusty shades as if to complement his colouring, to which he sometimes added a matching deerstalker when, with pleasant humour, he might be referred to as the 'laird'.

I was given to understand that EPH had received his decoration for his work in re-structuring the accounting system of the British Army. He was considered to have a brilliant brain.

I knew this to be true, because I had quickly learned not to ask EPH for instruction, leaving his office more confused than when I entered it; then I would have to ask someone else. It was a relief to be told that 'none of us understands', we listen to EPH and then work it out for ourselves afterwards.

Graeme Ogilvy Fairlie, Chartered Accountant worked downstairs. He was EPH's direct opposite in the way he dealt simply and clearly with the work in hand. He sat at his desk while giving dictation, unlike EPH who would wander the office, hands in trouser pockets jingling small change and often addressing his words through the window to the yard below.

In appearance, Mr Fairlie bore some resemblance to the actor Raymond Massey; that is to say he was very tall and thin, with dark hair and arresting features. He was urbane and, to my pleasure, extremely practical.

William Clement Mimmack, Incorporated Accountant, occupied such a pleasant world of book-keeping that, had I been the client concerned with the profit or loss of my company, he would have me believe that while the profit would always be agreeable, the loss, if any, would be nothing at all to worry about. As Mr Mimmack carefully lit his pipe, he intimated that he had all the time in the world to speak with whoever had called into the office to see him. I noticed that, from work which appeared to be non-existent, he seemed to be always at the stage of producing a beautifully hand-written balance sheet or profit and loss account. I had the suspicion that he worked long hours in the evenings, or at home; how else could he command such a persona?

## A LITTLE HISTORY

To me, Mr Mimmack was in many ways a father figure, and when I finally left the office after the war, I was touched when he expressed a similar warmth of feeling.

Mr Mimmack was grey haired and wore a moustache. His style was neat. A quiet grey haired middle-aged man is no description if one is looking for physical details. Just occasionally looks are of the least importance, perhaps even to the reader.

\*

I lived at home in the summer of 1939. Our house, 'Kenton', was in the Parish of St Clement and within walking distance of St Helier. It was one of a row of semi-detached houses with a garden back and front. It was not over-large but it was a comfortable family home.

My father was then fifty-eight years of age. He was born in Hove, Sussex and joined the regular army as a young man. 'I ran away from home and joined the army. I was sixteen but told them I was eighteen.' This statement may not have been strictly true, but it would have been in character. Running away from home he considered an adventure, not a matter of deprivation as might be inferred today. He first came to Jersey when he was about nineteen where he met my mother, Edith Tucker, who was born in Jersey (I am always conscious of the difference between being 'Jersey' and being 'Jersey born')

During the First World War of 1914/18 my father was for some time stationed at Elizabeth Castle with the garrison there. He also served in France, was mentioned in dispatches for bravery in the field and commissioned from the ranks to Lieutenant. The end of the war brought a change in the climate of opinion. The Great

## A LITTLE HISTORY

War, as it was known then, had been 'the war to end all wars', (a slogan that was repeated over and over again) and as a result the army made very many of its officers redundant, of which my father was one.

My parents returned to Jersey to live and, in 1922, the year I was born, my mother died. In 1925 my father married Ruby Marks, of the Bristol Hotel, St Helier.

My father had served in the regular army for over twenty years. The change to civilian life did not come easily. Since his redundancy he had taken up several positions, and in 1939 he was working as a representative at Ann Street Brewery in St Helier.

In looks, my father was tall, with blue eyes and a fair complexion. He was a handsome man, in spite of his grey hair and somewhat portly figure.

My step-mother Ruby was petite, just four feet ten inches in height. She was a little younger than my father, but insisted that a lady never disclosed her age. She was plump, wore tailored suits, and her semi-shingled hair was marshalled into careful waves. Her fine skin had a tendency to freckle, and her eyes could look attractively green at times. She had small and very pretty hands, beringed, and the fingernails beautifully manicured.

Michael, my half-brother, then aged thirteen, acted towards me as any brother would. We sparred often and at other times were quite friendly.

Gran had come to live with us, bringing her Yorkshire terrier, Judy. The Bristol Hotel had been sold. At seventy-seven Gran was well into her retirement.

How did I look then? I was five feet and two inches in height and weighed one hundred pounds. I was not a beauty but I was a true blonde, with blue-grey eyes, a fine clear skin and regular features. Fashion flattered us. We wore pretty frocks, petticoats (quite seriously, it was immodest not to wear a petticoat) silk stockings and high

## A LITTLE HISTORY

heeled shoes. To be slim was as important then as now. My waist measured twenty two inches.

I was still subject to periods of pain and discomfort which I ignored, confident of their transient nature. Medical opinion has it that it is never wise to disregard pain, but where is the dividing line between wisdom and hypochondria?

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## Declaration of War

What were you doing when war was declared on 3rd September 1939? Everybody likes this kind of question. I believe it arose after the assassination of John Kennedy. It is a good question. No-one ever forgets. I was on my way home and it was just after midday. Few people were about, as most were listening to the broadcast by the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain. It was a hot day for the time of year and windows were wide open. As I walked the words of the Prime Minister followed me, his speech concluding with the words ‘...received by the time stipulated, and consequently, we are at war with Germany.’

What were my reactions? My first reaction, unthinking and involuntary, was to look up at the sky as if expecting instant bombardment, my second was that something had happened without there being any manifestation of it. The death of a close friend causes a similar awareness – everything has changed but the sun shines and the birds sing on.

What actually happened? Nothing happened. Excitement and alarm followed the declaration of war, but it soon subsided, and after a flurry of activity at official level, life in the Island returned to a state near to normality.

## DECLARATION OF WAR

Jersey was placed on a war footing as far as a little island could be. Where civilians were concerned, a blackout was enforced and gas masks issued. An air raid siren practised its wailing call but occasioned no quickening of the pulse. The war, which was not expected to be of long duration, was being fought at sea, and a feeling of equanimity, if not complacency, prevailed. This continued up until the Spring of 1940, when Jersey was still being promoted as a holiday island. The fact that we considered ourselves to be part of Great Britain, in spirit if not in fact, brought an added sense of security. We came under the aegis of the British Government in all defensive matters. Many joined up.

There was no-one in my family of military age, when we might have gained some little intimation that this war was going to be unlike any other. Our dispositions were coloured by aspects of the First World War. Twenty years is not a very long time between wars, and it had been a time of slow technological advance. There were also similarities. Again, the enemy was Germany, and again, it was expected that France would become a battlefield; that Britain herself might be invaded was not worth thinking about.

I was drawn into a group which met once a week at a large town house to pack parcels for the troops, where we had the use of the dining room. We sat, six or seven women of various ages, around the highly polished mahogany dining table, and packed these parcels, containing among other things, woollen socks, cigarettes, balaclava helmets and something called a seidlitz powder. Even I felt we resembled a tableau from the past.

My father joined the Volunteer Defence Force. He was enjoying himself, reliving some of the memories of times past. It was not nostalgia in the true sense, for who could

## DECLARATION OF WAR

sentimentalise about war, but it had been an important part of his life.

Ruby and I were busy in the kitchen when my father first appeared wearing khaki battle-dress. His forage cap was a couple of sizes too small, being all that was available. It sat oddly on his nearly bald head. Ruby put her hand to her mouth to conceal her murmurings about a pimple on a ball of cheese and I busied myself with the cooking, but our unspoken comments, even if recognized, had no power to hurt. For the moment, Ruby and I were small fry.

My father's service revolver was brought out from the cupboard under the stairs where it had lain for years, but it was never displayed in our presence. On some evenings he stood guard duty, with others, at a folly on a hilltop known as Nicolle tower, it being a good lookout point. I am not sure if he took his revolver with him, but I know that he had a flask of whisky in one pocket and a pack of cards in the other.

The Defence Volunteers were never taken seriously, at least not by women, and were never put to the test. At the time of the evacuation prior to the Occupation my father burnt his uniform piece by piece in our small domestic boiler; a difficult task because of the dense, hairy texture of the cloth and not without causing some concern as smoke escaped from the front of the boiler before flames took hold and raced up the narrow chimney. The same pattern followed every addition to the fire. When at last the fire in the boiler was reduced to a smoulder and it was apparent that the house would not be set alight, my father drove in his car to the old harbour beyond Mount Bingham; there he threw his revolver over the old harbour wall into the sea rather than have it confiscated by the Germans.

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## Evacuation

The Germans had begun to make advances into France, and from the beginning of May 1940 awareness was growing of the ever increasing seriousness of the situation and of the Channel Islands' proximity to France.

It is to be wondered if the enormity of these developments was fully appreciated at the time by the general public. Perhaps I was too young to judge, but I do not think many people crouched next to the wireless, anxious not to miss a single news item. The news from the BBC was the national news and would not have highlighted the possible plight of the Channel Islands. All reports of the war were censored and therefore bland or 'morale boosting' whether listened to on the wireless or read in the national press. There was no television to bring the 'shock horror' of Hitler's blitzkrieg across Europe to our consciousness. In that respect there can be no comparison between then and now, but who can tell whether it was better to enjoy the sunshine for as long as possible while the storm gathered?

The British Expeditionary Force was retreating from France. By June 4th all allied troops had left Dunkirk. The Channel Islands were exposed to great danger, the advancing German army now almost on our doorstep.

## EVACUATION

France had fallen, and on June 17th the Prime Minister Winston Churchill broadcast the following Message to the People:

‘The news from France is very bad and I grieve for the gallant French people who have fallen into this terrible misfortune. Nothing will alter our feelings towards them or our faith that the genius of France will rise again. What has happened in France makes no difference to our actions or purpose. We have become the sole champions in arms to defend the world cause. We shall do our best to be worthy of this high honour. We shall defend our island home and with the British Empire we shall fight on unconquerable until the curse of Hitler is lifted from the brows of mankind. We are sure that in the end all will come right.’

I have quoted Mr Churchill’s Message to the People in full to give some idea of the highly charged atmosphere of the time. There was no doubting the emotions of most people; played down, naturally. It was called patriotism.

Two days later, on June 19th, the British Government declared the Channel Islands a demilitarised zone. On that statement our future, as Islanders rested. The troops and stores which, only a few days previously, had begun to arrive for the defence of the Island of Jersey, were now to be withdrawn to comply with the Island’s new status, that of an open town.

Malcolm Muggeridge once gave a talk on the radio on what he called the ‘glorious eccentricity of the English’. It must be a part of that eccentricity that whenever much hard work has been done to produce a desired public effect, it is perfectly in order to say afterwards that the whole thing was thoroughly mismanaged. In the matter of the urgent consideration of the position of the Channel Islands against an advancing army, I expect the same

## EVACUATION

could be said, and was said, but there could still be pride, if not the glory attributed by Mr Muggeridge, in the fact that ultimately the right decision was made.

The British Government announced that a voluntary evacuation of the Islands would be catered for by the sending of a limited number of steamships for those who wished to leave. The word 'limited' was enough to fill anyone with apprehension. In Jersey the evacuation was intended to be an orderly process over several days, and but for the fact that in the end only 6,500 chose to leave, it might easily have turned into a harrowing free-for-all.

Fighting was now out of the question, but flight, that was another matter. Whatever tentative decisions had been reached previously at home, it now seemed obligatory that they should be reviewed.

In fact, there were no contingency plans at home, no discussions about the advisability or not of closing Kenton and moving to England. There was a solidity about life in Jersey then and change was unlooked for. A family house was bought for a lifetime and beyond. Moving house these days is viewed with much less consideration. There is a restlessness in populations now to be often on the move, to change house, town, city or country, to be where advantages lie. We are all Europeans now. It is a way of life. It was not so then.

So, in the spring of 1940, an innate reluctance to move house was compounded by the fact that we would be leaving behind an unguarded property to become refugees of a kind or, more correctly, poor relations looking to the family in England for support. It was tacitly agreed that we would only leave if it came to the crunch, and perhaps not even then.

As the time for making a decision became imminent the urgent question of whether to go or to stay engrossed us night and day. Mentally we were in a state of constant

## EVACUATION

readiness to leave, and at the same time we found every reason for staying. Each evening our final decision was the same – that we would stay. Each night between 2 a.m. and 5 a.m., the trunk calls would start coming in, the family in England having at last got through. They begged us to leave. The 'phone was in the downstairs hall, and we huddled on the stairs, each waiting for a turn to speak and to give reassurances that we were making the right decision. In the morning, tired as we were, and after such impassioned pleading, our decision to stay seemed to unravel and the next evening would be spent in heartsearching until our intention to stay was reaffirmed, and before the night calls began again. In all the turmoil attendant on these discussions, the impracticalities were understated. Put simply, Gran was unfit to travel. No solutions were sought to this difficulty, thus bolstering an underlying wish to remain in the Island against all reasonable arguments from those who wished us to do otherwise.

During this time a semblance of normality prevailed. My father continued work at the Ann Street Brewery, Ruby managed the house and cared for Gran, Michael went to Victoria College until the schools closed, and I went to the office. There, I found the same chaotic conditions and the same decision-making as at home. Mr Mimmack struck a pose by sitting in his office as usual, books open before him and pipe going well, and with an air of wondering what the fuss was all about. The two clerks hung around the door of Mr Hellyer's office. They were leaving for the harbour and wanted their salaries.

I was sent to the General Post Office in St Helier time after time with batches of telegrams informing our clients of the local conditions, or stating more emphatically that we were unable to send private ledgers, cars, jewellery or whatever else was required.

## EVACUATION

As in every grave situation, there was humour, as some husbands or wives took the opportunity they had always been waiting for. On one of my errands to the Post Office I stood behind a man waiting his turn at the counter. He held his prepared telegram form so that I could easily read the words 'Come back next boat. Bill'.

I remember well my last such errand. It was early afternoon, the weather hot and sunny. The leaves of the lime trees bordering the taxi rank opposite the Post Office moved gently in the light airs of a perfect summer's day. As we in the queue waited, an official came out and posted a notice. He returned inside, the double doors were closed, and in the ensuing silence we could hear, quite clearly, the bolts being drawn. The word 'silence' might indicate that I am indulging in a little fiction in order to lend weight to a dramatic situation. Not so. On that afternoon, and at that particular time, there may have been the sound of passing traffic or the drone of aircraft overhead, but I remember only the silence and the rustling of leaves on the trees.

The notice on the door was stark.

**'ALL COMMUNICATION WITH THE MAINLAND  
HAS NOW CEASED'**

The queue moved steadily forward then broke. The message was clear. Few spoke. People drifted away.

I moved through the town, completely absorbed by the events taking place. I was seventeen years old and impressionable. People in my age group were ardent cinemagoers. Hollywood was in its heyday and it was the era of the great screen epic. In comparison with the everyday life of the time it would not be outrageous to suggest that, as I stood on the steps outside the Royal Court and facing the Royal Square, I might view the scene below me as part of an elaborate film set. The people crossing and re-crossing the Royal Square as

## EVACUATION

extras in a 'cast of thousands' as they used to say, making their exits before the next big scene.

At home I found that my sister Nell and her three year old daughter Jean had called to say good-bye. Nell had decided to evacuate so as to not lose touch with her husband who was serving with the British forces. My father took charge. He said to her, 'Where is your money?'

'In my suitcase, to be forwarded.'

'Take it out and sew it in your vest. Ruby will help you.', then 'Where is your jewellery?'

'In my handbag.'

'Take it out and put it all on Jean.'

I went with my father to see them leave. At the pier, the passengers were divided into groups of a dozen or so. Our group moved forward slowly, then stopped, then moved forward again. Each passenger was allowed one piece of hand luggage only, so many people wore extra layers of clothing. The sun beat down and they were already hot and uncomfortable. As well as her one item of luggage Nell carried a folding push-chair. She suffered from rheumatoid arthritis and had difficulty in lifting and carrying Jean.

One of the passengers held a large paper carrier bag. It split open and tins of peaches, pears and apricots rolled about the quay. His choice of essential luggage was extraordinary, comical even, but nobody laughed. He gathered the cans into his arms, and looked around hopefully for another paper bag.

Little by little we edged nearer the landing stage where there were several small cargo boats lying alongside. Eventually Nell and Jean began boarding one of these boats. At the top of the gangplank Nell tried to hold on to the push-chair. She pleaded desperately to be allowed to keep it, but there was no consideration for anyone's

## EVACUATION

personal problems, and it was thrown back onto the quay by one of the crew. We had one last sight of them, two faces in a group who had managed to secure seating space on the hatch covers of the open deck.

At home, my father and I found Ruby in an emotional state. She said to me 'I thought you might have changed your mind and taken the chance to leave with Nell.'

It had never been in my mind to do so. It had always seemed to me to be unrealistic to walk out of our house with little money, and carrying just a personal bag. It was different for Nell. I inclined towards my father's view that some had to stay behind to look after the Island's interests as well as our own.

Some, my grandchildren perhaps, might ask 'But weren't you caught up in the excitement of the moment?' and the answer would be 'No, every other emotion perhaps, but excitement?' No, excitement had no part in the evacuation.

For the first time in my life, I had the notion that I was a free agent. I had chosen not to leave the Island and now, somewhat numbed, could stand aside and be unmoved by the dilemma of choice affecting so many others; the poignant leavetakings and the added anguish of having a loved pet put down without ceremony. On the 21st June, the Animals Shelter announced that over 5,000 cats and dogs had been destroyed.

I was young and naive, but I felt quite calm, almost self-contained. In fact I had about as much control over my situation as a butterfly in a rainstorm.

That evening we had a kind of celebratory meal. I baked a dish of macaroni cheese. It was our first 'sitting round the table' family meal after the disorganisation of the previous weeks. I served the macaroni cheese, so appealing this bubbling and savory dish, now that our appetites were restored. At the first mouthful, eager

## EVACUATION

expressions changed to those of extreme distaste. In a familiar gesture, Ruby's hand flew to her mouth to hide the laughter.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

'I forgot to tell you' she replied, 'but the milkman has evacuated and the milk you have been using for the sauce came from a tin, sweetened and condensed.'

All the outward show of preparation for a hurried departure now fell away. The winter coats and pullovers, always at hand to be worn over our summer clothes, were returned to their proper quarters. The bags of hard boiled eggs, which had been our emergency rations, were consigned to the dustbin. But more than anything else it was the reappearance of the Dresden china figures in the sitting room that signified at that the family was at home. Only a week ago Ruby had carefully wrapped each ornament in soft cloth and had taken them away for safe keeping; and now they were back, these china busts of country girls with their artlessly draped shawls and little bonnets, one sporting a jaunty blue feather; their gently blushing cheeks seemed to deprecate the importance given to their welfare when, for a brief moment, they had seemed to have priorities equal to our own.

There was nothing to do now except wait and wonder about our future. The waiting time was not overlong. On 1st July 1940 the first troops of the German Army of Occupation arrived and on the following day took control of the administration of the Island.

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## Occupation

Ruby and I sat in a taxi threading its way through the narrow streets of St Helier. White flags, as ordered by the German authorities, hung from every window. We sat primly, looking straight ahead. No-one spoke, not even the taxi driver, whom we knew well.

We were visiting my father, who was in the General Hospital recovering from a minor operation. The beds from the male surgical ward had been moved to one of the main corridors, its vaulted granite ceiling a protection against flying glass from bombardment. My father was in excellent spirits, one could almost say he was enjoying himself. He had a certain look in his eye as if he were preparing a campaign strategy. Wives and daughters acted as orderlies these few days, the nursing staff being depleted by those who had chosen to evacuate. Ruby and I helped to wash patients and make beds, and then served my father with the meal we had brought with us. On the way home in the taxi, we were able to settle more comfortably into our seats. It was a warm and windless summer afternoon and the white flags, limp and unprotesting, seemed not so devastating in their effect. My father had embodied the acceptance of a challenge. In short, he had cheered us up.

## OCCUPATION

Across the road from our house in St Clement was a large vacant site. It must have been vacant long before we moved there because it was a maze of broken paths, shrubby growth and wild flowers. Horse radish grew in abundance and was cut and the root scraped to enhance roast beef on Sundays. Gran liked to take a walk there to exercise Judy, her Yorkshire terrier.

This wasteland was in the flight-path of troop-carrying aircraft which began to arrive in a steady stream, one behind the other, hedge-hopping across the Island from east to west. They were Junkers, heavy and slow, and flew so low that the pilot could clearly be seen at the controls. Some had a symbolic device painted on the underside of the fuselage depicting sharp teeth and gaping jaws, intended to terrorise. During daylight hours, one of these troop carriers always seemed to be in the sky, or just appearing over the trees bordering a marshy area nearby. As I have remarked, they came singly, but steadily and purposefully, and I think they probably made their presence felt more than if a fleet of aircraft had landed the troops in a fraction of the time.

Gran would not be dissuaded from making her usual promenade. Whenever I accompanied her I felt that we were vulnerable, in the way that an upright figure on a plain invites being struck by lightning. There was no danger, we were not about to be strafed, but my feeling was that one couldn't count on it. Gran refused to be hurried. I held her arm. 'Don't rush me' she would say, and shook my hand away if I protested when one of the Junkers flew lower than the others. Surely there was an incongruity, an essence of surrealism even, in our presence in this tumbledown landscape prettified with grass and wild flowers, while the Junkers flew overhead; that we should continue at this gentle pace, walking the

## OCCUPATION

dog, while the provision for an army of occupation was taking place.

These two vignettes, I think, illustrate the early days of the occupation more clearly than facts and figures quoted from the official archives.

In town and in the country the Army of Occupation made its presence felt. As with uninvited guests and their potential as trouble makers, the intention was to keep the situation cool by ignoring their presence; the irony being that, for the present, the German Army was the host and we the unwelcome guests, our own potential as trouble makers, alas, almost non-existent.

There was no way of avoiding the occupying troops. They appeared friendly but we did not return the compliment, rather we observed them, occasionally with wry amusement, as when some of their officers patronised Gaudin's cafe in St Helier. They wore long grey leather coats and ceremonial swords. They sat at the little tables drinking coffee, but it was not quite Café René. Consider for a moment enjoying from a comfortable armchair the high comedy of 'Allo Allo'; now take away the ludicrous script and exaggerated expressions, but leave the chief characters in place; now return to them their true identities in Occupied France, and soon you would begin to shift uncomfortably in your seat.

After three months of occupation the town of St Helier looked empty and desolate. There had been a run on the shops. Unseasonably cold winds in early October underscored the depression of a town deprived of its ability to trade.

We were under martial law and lived by proclamations, orders and notices originating from the military government in Paris under the regulations issued for Occupied France. For the civil population, most

## OCCUPATION

concerned food rationing and restrictions of one kind or another. One such notice appeared in the Jersey Evening Post dated 17th October 1940 :

### “JEWS TO REGISTER”

The Bailiff said he had received two orders from the German authorities, the first relating to measures to be taken for the registration of Jews.”

“This was read by the Attorney-General, and on his conclusions was lodged au Greffe and its promulgation ordered.”

“The Bailiff announced that he had entrusted the Chief Aliens Officer with the registration of Jews under the Order.”

I have perused the copy of the ‘Evening Post’ in which this Order was reported, and observe that just a couple of column inches were attributed to it, so I am inclined to think that the editor has used this manner to express his distaste for it, most Orders being given full display and headed in bold type.

At first Ruby refused to register, seeing no reason to do so. She was a British subject, and as for religion, she declared herself to be an agnostic and, if questioned further, would have said that she had never been in a synagogue in her life; but the Order required not only the registration of Jews but the descendants of Jews back to the third generation.

Both Ruby’s parents had roots in the Anglo-Jewish community of persons dislocated from Eastern Europe by pogrom or lack of opportunity, but by 1885 when Lewis Marks married Gran, born Theresa Leibman Leopold, in St Helier, according to the rights and ceremonies of the

## OCCUPATION

Church of England, they were naturalised British subjects.

The foregoing is a small detail from the recent research into family history by the descendants of the Marks family living in Canada. Tracing one's roots has become something of a pastime in the last decade, always with interesting results. The account of Ruby's maternal ancestors is no exception. Such family history was never touched on at home – you could say there was silence on the subject. It was not deliberate, rather that it was so long ago that the family had renounced its Jewishness that the old tales were also lost and, perhaps purposefully, forgotten. The Jewish connection was accepted without interest, having little significance.

It would not have been without interest to the German authorities. Their records would, with typical German thoroughness, have been up to date.

For Ruby to have ignored the order would have shown spirit, but that spirit would have had to be sustained for an indefinite period, before the inevitable knock on the door. Until that time, every knock on the door would have been intimidating, and every walk down the hall require a tight degree of control, until the shadow behind one of the leaded glass panels flanking the front door assumed a familiar shape. 'The knock on the door' is a well used expression and never fails to excite emotions. It was used then by my father, but the Germans were under no obligation to knock on doors. They would have walked in.

We were a small community, with no way of shielding anyone's identity. Ruby had no option but to register with the Chief Aliens Officer, whatever her feelings. The German authorities appeared, so far, to be respectful. It was hoped that nothing would come of it.

## OCCUPATION

Gran had suffered a series of strokes over the past few months. She lay in bed upstairs, and although we kept her company, she remained unaware of any disturbance in the household.

Ruby now became fully occupied with the difficulties of home nursing, and it was left to me to exercise Judy on the empty site opposite our house. The wasteland had returned to itself, neither friendly nor unfriendly, taking its cue from the mood of those walking there. November can be a splendid month in Jersey, rich in hedgerow colour, the trees having taken the brunt of the October gales, but I saw none of it, and hurried Judy along the grassy paths, she (I don't think she liked me) as eager as I to get home.

Gran died, quite peacefully, just before Christmas.

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In the early part of 1941 I remarked a lack of spirit as well as an absence of social life in the Island. It was not entirely due to the recent troubles at home. I wonder now if it was a general malaise, Island wide, and born out of anti-climax and an unwillingness to accept the fact that the Occupation might be prolonged. From having had to make so many difficult and important decisions the previous June, it was now impossible to make any decisions at all, and this, together with a host of daily inconveniences could, in its effect, induce a kind of mental inertia. In my imagination I found it comparable to the physical inertia brought about by walking through deep soft sand, unsuitably dressed and the destination, if any, unclear.

Times were not yet hard. Perhaps that was the trouble.

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## OCCUPATION

During the Occupation there was one doctor practising in Jersey whose name was very much to the fore. He was Dr John Gow. As many people came to know him, he was a large and genial man who could have walked out of a novel by A J Cronin. His manner was that of a kind uncle. He called all women 'lassie' regardless of age. When out on call he would close a child's hand around a sixpenny piece, and was known to sometimes waive his bill if he knew that a patient was in difficulty, for there was no social security then. I cannot comment on his skill as a doctor, but he was certainly larger than life.

Our family doctor, Dr Gallagher, having died, and with a recurrence of pain which I found to be more than unusually severe, I made an appointment to see Dr Gow.

I described my symptoms to him in detail and that it was thought that I suffered from sciatica from time to time. Without any examination he said to me 'Lassie, girls of your age don't have sciatica,' and I was referred to Mr Halliwell's clinic at the General Hospital.

## PART TWO

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## General Hospital

Who has not attended a clinic at sometime in their lives? There is something less than noteworthy about one's attendance at a clinic, it being a kind of halfway house between diagnosis and treatment or between treatment and discharge. It lacks drama. It is not the casualty department.

The clinic Ruby and I attended at the General Hospital in St Helier was held by Mr Halliwell, the consultant surgeon. It was my second visit. This time I would know the results of my X-rays and the skin test I had been given less than an hour ago.

I was not anxious about the outcome of these investigations. I expected very little to come out of them; a recommendation for some heat treatment perhaps and a prescription for use on bad days. This was a good day. I felt no pain. I turned to smile at Ruby, as we shifted on the hard wooden chairs.

Waiting allowed the mind to drift. A cool draught of air from the open sash windows played around my head, lifting the hair away from my face. All summer was out there. I felt reminded of the Convent when, on such a summer's day, I might have gazed out of the window, waiting for the bell to signal the end of class. The windows in the waiting room were similar, deeply recessed with broad granite sills. I eased my chair back a

little, and the grating sound it made brought back the sound of thirty wooden chairs being drawn back; the opening and closing of desk lids; Mother Philomena rising to her feet as we pupils knelt beside our desks and began the prayer 'An Act of Contrition'. And then we were free to.....

The time for reverie was over. It was two o'clock. Mr Halliwell had arrived, on the minute. The clinic was open and Ruby and I were the first to be called into the surgery.

The dark red stain on the inside of my forearm, about the size of an old shilling piece, showed a positive reaction to the skin test I had received. It confirmed the diagnosis that I was suffering from tuberculosis. Mr Halliwell came straight to the point.

'You have TB of the right sacro-iliac joint and will have to come into hospital and spend a year in a plaster cast, on your back.' I looked at him as if I hadn't heard.

'When will you come in?'

'On Monday.' Was it really I, answering the question in such a matter-of-fact way?

I must have looked stunned, because Ruby patted my hand as she whispered to me 'It's going to be all right.' As we left the hospital I glanced up at the clock above the entrance. It was ten minutes past two.

On the way home, I wondered why I had given myself only one week's grace. I felt well, and had excuses to hand as to why I should not start treatment right away; having to give in my notice to Barton Mayhew & Co. was one of them. No doubt Mr Halliwell used a psychological approach to patients such as I. His question 'When will you come in?' had demanded an answer, not a prevarication. I realised that the timing of his question was masterly, leaving me with no time to think or to ask the opinions of others.

## GENERAL HOSPITAL

So, a date was fixed for my admittance to the General Hospital. I felt no real apprehension. Fortunately, I had never known anyone with tuberculosis. Had I been asked I would have had to quote from romantic novels of the time where, in tender scenes, the heroine languished on a couch, her beauty undiminished as her disease progressed; and as for tuberculosis of the bones and joints – nothing. It was therefore with naivety that I accepted the surgeon's words 'a year' as if he had gazed into a crystal ball and had already seen the outcome of the proposed treatment. I expected to be cured within twelve months, and had only a dim awareness of the kind of situation in which I might find myself, in my plaster cast.

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The General Hospital where I was to become a patient has changed only in respect of its extension and modernisation. It is situated to the west of St Helier, its main entrance on Gloucester Street. At the head of the street (all streets in Jersey are short) a small park known as the Parade forms a natural boundary. Walking down Gloucester Street and passing the hospital on the right hand side, there were then a few commercial buildings before one reached the wide expanse of the Esplanade and crossed over to a narrow promenade and the sea-wall.

The sea-wall is too high for leaning on and gazing out to sea, but it was, after all, built for defensive purposes. Massive smooth-faced granite blocks of exact size and symmetry form its structure.

There are times when a high tide is contained behind the sea wall giving it all the appearance of a pleasure pool, but there are others when a spring tide with a

## GENERAL HOSPITAL

strong backing wind will, on meeting the wall, fling plumes of spray high into the air, overwhelming the Promenade and cascading down the storm drains along the Esplanade. At such times all traffic is brought to a standstill.

Patients in the hospital, despite being confined to their beds, could if they listened, hear the sounds the waves made. I doubt if you would hear them now, but in 1941 and a year into the Occupation, private cars, with few exceptions, were no longer on the road. Most had been requisitioned and sent to France. Apart from German driven vehicles, the streets were quiet, with an almost total absence of traffic.

And then there were the herring gulls, their number increased by proximity to St Helier harbour. Their various calls could be interpreted according to the whim and circumstances of the patient. To some it might be an evocation of loneliness, to others a raucous hilarity and vulgar chuckles and yet to others an echo of a dirge for the souls of mariners lost at sea, as legend would have us believe.

So much for the sea environment, the leitmotif that subconsciously influences every aspect of life to anyone island born.

The Hospital itself stood well back from its Gloucester Street entrance. In front was a large open forecourt, surrounded by a granite wall of medium height. This wall was broken by a gatehouse through which passed a narrow roadway for traffic. Once past the gatehouse, the view of the hospital was impressive, the building large, seemingly square and built almost entirely of pink granite. 'Pink' is too commonplace a word to use in describing the colour of the local stone. Pink is indeed there, but the colours comprising it range from gold though bronze to grey, with mica crystals giving a

## GENERAL HOSPITAL

liveliness to the warm heavy overtones. Rows of tall arched windows faced the visitor, each one recessed within an arch outlined by wedge-shaped blocks of dressed stone known as voussoirs. Wide granite steps led up to the main entrance, above which was an inscription which stated that the hospital was founded in 1765 and rebuilt in 1793 after having been partly destroyed by fire in 1783. The period would have been Georgian, but I am not qualified to comment on the style of the hospital's architecture. To whichever style was chosen, the granite would have added its own voice, as would local building traditions.

Such a handsome building might command respect, but also dismay. As a child I had regarded the hospital as a prison, the gatehouse a 'passport to oblivion'. That is a contemporary phrase, but to a child of the early thirties enthralled by popular fiction which had much to do with the French revolution, the mental picture would not have been of the patient borne swiftly by ambulance through the gatehouse, but of the victim standing in a tumbrel, jolting and creaking over the cobbles. I was a fanciful child. Despite being older and wiser, there were still certain aspects of the hospital which I found forbidding.

After nearly a year of German occupation, the hospital functioned as well as it was able, which was very well indeed despite the shortages in all departments. The Germans had control of the first floor which included main wards and operating theatres. The public were served in the wards remaining, and when space became short, by utilising every nook and cranny of the building. The week before my admittance passed quickly. Ruby and I went shopping in St Helier in search of nightdresses and pretty bed jackets. The latter were easy to find, being absent from almost everyone's list of requirements. I

## GENERAL HOSPITAL

approved of everything we bought as if not personally involved, but merely a bystander watching someone else choosing a small trousseau. I was not unhappy. I was not anything. A psychologist might suggest that I found the prospect ahead too daunting to contemplate, and so I simply shut it out. It may have been so.

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On the 8th June 1941 I presented myself at the porter's desk in the vestibule at the General Hospital. Ruby and I were directed to the orthopaedic ward, and we walked the passageways towards a part of the hospital called 'old maternity alley'.

The use of granite seemed as extensive inside the hospital as outside. The main corridors with their elegant stonework were bright and busy places, but the passages which led off them also led one into dour imaginings; their smooth granite flags more than hinted at old privations, in modern parlance the workhouse image. This was not a first impression, we were too busy finding the way, but I came to know these passages with their lack of light and air, and the bleakness of the closed stone.

This was 'old maternity alley'. Names have such great power. Orthopaedic ward. Now here was a name with overtones of medical expertise, to inspire the patient with confidence. Though true to everything its name implied in a medical sense, the orthopaedic ward was something of a surprise. In the creation of this ward with its lack of space and any facility apart from one wash hand basin, it could be said that the hospital management had explored the limits of that famous wartime phrase, 'making do'. Everyone suffered from the Germans' presence in the hospital. In this instance the nurses suffered too because

the orthopaedic ward had previously been the nurses' sick bay.

This little ward was a narrow, high-ceiling room with two tall arched windows along one side. Four beds, a locker's width apart, had their backs close up against these windows. They were tightly spaced and one could touch hands with the next patient. This left a stretcher-width passageway from the door, passing the foot of each bed, to two cubicles, now re-designated the nurses' sick bay. The decoration was sombre, brown and dark green predominating.

My bed was to be the second from the door. Ruby stayed to see me settled in and then left, taking my clothes with her; a summer dress, minimal underwear and sandals. A small parcel, but of what great significance. I felt that a part of my life was in that parcel. I thought I knew how prisoners felt on giving up their personal belongings .... until their eventual release. Having my clothes taken away brought some realisation of the long months ahead. Would I be a happy prisoner, I wondered? My two companions-to-be, one on either side, introduced themselves. One lady was retired and the other was of indeterminate age. We greeted each other in a friendly, if guarded, way.

The following morning I was taken to theatre to have a plaster cast made.

I was told that plaster bandages dried quickly and were light in weight, but because they were no longer obtainable, homemade ones would be used. The plaster would be a shell extending down my back from just above the waist to just above the knees.

I lay face down on the operating table.

To hand were three buckets standing on the floor. The first held loosely rolled gauze bandages, the second plaster of Paris and the third, water. The method was to

shake a bandage in the plaster of Paris then plunge it into the water and pass it quickly to Mr Halliwell, the surgeon. He unwound each plaster bandage back and forth across my back and legs until sufficient density was built up to hold a rigid shape.

The preparation of the plaster bandages involved a team of three, one of whom was a medical student who I had met quite recently at a social occasion. Lying prone, it wasn't too difficult to avoid his eye, but to my embarrassment he sought mine with great amusement.

When the plaster was finished, everyone went for coffee and I was left in the theatre to 'dry off a bit'. I had been turned, and now lay on my back in the plaster shell supported by a low pedestal. A pillow was under my head, and my legs, in long cream woollen stockings, stuck out in front.

I needed distraction, any distraction, and as Raymond, my student friend, was leaving the theatre, I asked if I could have something to read. He came back, almost immediately, with a medical textbook. Lying so, I had difficulty in turning the pages, and a glance at the illustrations provided enough reason for me to close it again. The book lay on my chest and I folded my hands piously on it in the manner of an effigy on top of a tomb; a little imagination and I was robed and a dog lay curled under my feet.....

There was the sound of approaching footsteps which stopped abruptly at the open door of the theatre and a sudden hissing intake of breath. The fact that someone was lying on the operating table must have been quite a shock to the person standing there. Whoever it was, I didn't want him or her to go away again. I called out quickly.

'Come in, it's quite all right.'

Mrs Ryan, with cleaning materials, came in. She walked slowly round the end of the operating table and for quite a minute she stood looking at me, leaning on her mop handle, her lips pursed. I looked at her and saw a small grey haired woman wearing an overall. Her face was round and puckered, the more so by her present expression.

Without a word, Mrs Ryan began to clean away the debris on the tiled floor which had resulted from the making of the plaster bandages, keeping as far away from me as possible and sucking her teeth as she worked. I wanted a conversation, but she wouldn't, only pursing her lips every time she glanced in my direction. I alarmed her and she wanted nothing to do with me, as if even the sound of her voice might trigger something appalling to send her hurrying from the theatre. The cleaning done she gathered together her mop and buckets and after giving me one last look, she left, the very sound of her retreating footsteps telling of her relief.

Mr Halliwell returned and expressed himself satisfied with the plaster. It was retained for further drying, and I was taken back to the ward. There were two days, long with the tedium of waiting, before the plaster shell arrived.

In its completed state, it looked like a hollow sculpture of someone, or part of someone, wearing bermuda shorts cut across from side to side and the front discarded. I lay in this shell, bound to it by wide canvas straps over stomach and thighs. My pillows were taken away.

The sacro-iliac joint forms part of the pelvic girdle, and is the fixed joint between the sacrum and the ilium. Being in plaster ensured its complete immobilisation. I had the full use of my arms but could only move my head from side to side. I could exercise my feet a little but could not move them out of position. The fact that I

could wiggle my toes seemed important, an unexpected luxury now that my mobility was so severely restrained.

My first week in plaster was a study in adjustment. I ached everywhere and my back felt as if it were pushed up into my stomach. I refused to use a feeding cup and experimented with glasses of water, most of which went down my neck. By the end of the week, however, I could count two improvements. I was allowed a wafer thin pillow to raise my head a little and I could help myself to a drink of water from a glass, if it were only half full. I didn't expect the nurses to always remember this requirement, but the occasional shower in the night came each time as a complete surprise. It occurred to me that any doctor outlining this course of treatment should add 'sense of humour needed'.

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Of my companions in the little ward, Miss Le Blancq was a retired school teacher. She was in her early seventies and looked thin and frail. She had a fractured femur as the result of a fall and her whole leg was encased in plaster.

Miss Le Blancq was cheerful and kind, and it was not until much later that I heard the story of her accident. It was easy to visualise the two sisters walking together, side by side, along the pavement. It was raining and their umbrellas must have been held low to protect their upper bodies. It may have been that Miss Le Blancq was unable to see clearly where she was going. She stumbled and fell heavily.

It was not an uncommon accident, and when I knew her in the little ward, Miss Le Blancq was on the way to making a good recovery; the sadness of it lay in the fact that Miss Le Blancq's sister had suffered a heart attack,

brought on by shock, and died within hours of Miss Le Blancq's admission to hospital.

No-one in the ward was aware of Miss Le Blancq's circumstances. We only noticed that she had few visitors.

Several large volumes on Greek mythology rested on Miss Le Blancq's locker. She read for long periods, the pile of books beside her creating an illusion of privacy.

Miss Le Rossignol had diabetes and, because of an expected shortage of insulin in the Island, she had come into hospital to have her diet monitored. For the short while that I knew her, her diet was meagre in the extreme and seemed to consist of little more than watercress. She was very thin, her face narrow, the features finedrawn. Her hair was almost black, abundant, but kept strictly under control. Her dark eyes could not exactly be said to flash, but she expressed a certain exoticism in contrast to which Miss Le Blancq and I could be described as homely.

Miss Le Rossignol was very proper, in that she disapproved of my reading a book by Ethel Manin, a famous novelist of the times, which she considered 'suggestive'. Her nightgowns were wonderful, of white calico and with long sleeves and high necks, embroidered frills cascading down the front. The word 'wonderful' is used here as meaning incredible, out-of-date and totally old fashioned in 1941. Sometimes of an evening Miss Le Rossignol entertained Miss Le Blancq and me by reciting the names and pedigrees of each of the cows at her farm in St Ouen. Some of these pedigrees were long and sounded more mythical than Miss Le Blancq's legends.

Miss Le Rossignol (how formal we were then) was able to get out of bed at will, to our admiration and to our advantage. It gave me a comfortable feeling just to see her walking about and to know she could summon help in an emergency. There never was an emergency, we

## GENERAL HOSPITAL

were very well cared for by the nursing staff, but because we needed little attention, we were sometimes left alone for long periods, and it was then that I had some intimation of how it would feel to be stranded in a quiet backwater, away from the mainstream, lost and quite forgotten.

It was June, and Jersey was enjoying a heatwave. We soon became aware of it in the little ward. Below our windows was a courtyard. Bare but for raked gravel, it was at a lower level, access being by way of a short flight of granite steps. The courtyard held the heat as in a cauldron and threw it back at us until long after sunset.

It is not my intention to give the impression that we were like prisoners in a cell. The only analogy was that we were constrained within the four corners of our beds. My childhood fancy that the hospital was a prison was no doubt due to the fact that HM Prison was right next to the hospital buildings. From the little ward we could sometimes hear those sentenced to hard labour 'cracking stones' which I took to mean working with granite.

Visiting hours were few and eagerly awaited, but we had other visitors outside these times. Matron visited us, also doctors, my medical student friends, VADs, the clergy, cleaners and the occasional gate-crasher.

The VAD nurses (visiting nurses from the Voluntary Aid Detachment) were cheerful ladies. They entered the ward as a breath of fresh air, or so was their intention. We would be all the better for their visit, or so they implied. They were full of a kind of bonhomie that seemed to exclude the fact that the patients were actually ill, or at the very least suffering some discomfort.

On their appointed afternoon two VADs would fill the little ward with their presence. They made my bed and inexpertly replaced the small pads or cushions under my back and knees which enabled me to lie comfortably in

the plaster. Miss Le Blancq was treated in a similar fashion. Their breath of fresh air was a whistling wind, but in the evening, when our beds had been remade, we reviewed the afternoon with pleasure. 'Something different' as they say now.

One of the VADs cut my toenails expertly. They had been untended since my arrival; had I stayed longer in the hospital, I would have hoped to have struck a bargain with her, a pedicure in exchange for bed making. Unfortunately we never knew the names of these kind ladies.

My father was a gate-crasher, but one evening he pushed his luck too far. Up until then he had contrived several little visits outside visiting hours, either through lack of detection, or by the use of persuasion and charm on the sister in charge.

It was a stifflingly hot evening and, the hospital rules being relaxed slightly, Miss Le Blancq, Miss Le Rossignol and I were permitted to lie on our beds in our nightgowns with the sheets folded back.

We presented a curious trio. Miss Le Rossignol lay in chaste white calico but Miss Le Blancq and I had trouble in concealing our plasters. No patient now would be so inhibited, but we considered the plasters an indignity and did what we could by way of a cover-up; Miss Le Blancq by artfully draped sheeting while my bare legs extended from a bunched-up nightgown in the manner of a child's romper.

My father thought that he had timed his visit nicely to coincide with the coming on duty of the night staff. He claimed a slight acquaintance with Sister Le Feuvre, who had come from retirement to assist at the hospital as night sister. He was beaming as he strolled into the ward. Sister Le Feuvre, who happened to be standing by one of the cubicles at the far end of the ward, did not return the

compliment. She drew herself up and was affronted, and my father vanished, almost instantaneously, as might the demon in a pantomime when faced with the power of good.

With a look of extreme distaste, Sister Le Feuvre flicked the sheets over us one by one before she left.

Those were decorous days. Patients lay in beds so perfectly and tightly made that it was almost impossible to move. Heatwave or no heatwave, I think that we three were allowed to lie on the tops of our beds, as it were, only because we were in a little corner and out of sight: even so, that a man should have wandered in, unannounced, to the sight of partially clad women could certainly not be tolerated.

We were properly visited by the Roman Catholic priest, Père Guèrin, a small man with a jutting beard and dressed entirely in black. I thought him old, but how old is old when one is eighteen? He came every week to give Communion, always before daybreak, his approach announced by the flickering light from his candle. The candle in its candlestick carefully set down and the light steadied, Père Guèrin would begin his prayers. His moving shadow was made huge on the wall, his beard nodding and dipping to his murmurings.

The hospital chaplain, Canon Cohu, also visited us weekly to give communion. He was an imposing figure and had a fine voice. His style was severely cramped in our little ward with its narrow walk space, the more so as he invariably chose to visit at 10 a.m. and at which time Mrs Ryan also chose to scrub the floor. As Canon Cohu paced up and down I do believe that Mrs Ryan moved her bucket from left to right in the hope that the Canon might put his foot in it. Did she dislike Anglicans, I wondered, as her name might suggest, or had they fallen

out at some time? At all events, she scrubbed with enthusiasm.

The heatwave continued. Miss Le Blancq and I were given presents of camembert cheese. A Purchasing Commission had been set up in France and from time to time certain items became freely available. The hot weather may have prompted this shipment. At first the camembert was a delicious treat; after two days patients were asked to please remove cheese from lockers. It was not considered an unreasonable request.

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The advent of the cheese, and its pungency, was almost forgotten when our lockers were invaded by a colony of ants. I was now proficient in the use of a hand mirror to view the contents of my top drawer. From the ants' point of view it was a complete debacle. Miss Le Blancq became convinced that the ants were in her plaster and did no good trying to rout them with a knitting needle. After the ants were cleared, Miss Le Blancq went on itching and imagining for several days. The cheese was blamed for alerting the ants and patients were now asked to please remove all food from lockers. This request was not so well received and in fact not complied with .... but the ants did not return.

The bed next to mine, the third bed in the ward, was kept spare and used only for sudden admissions of a short-stay nature. Elisabeth Brine, dark haired, grey eyed and with a pale, creamy complexion, occupied it for a few days. We knew each other, both having attended the Convent FCJ. Our beds being so close, we were able to whisper far into the night. It was a real conversation, very different from the social niceties of visiting days. Elisabeth was a probationer nurse (student nurse). Her

## GENERAL HOSPITAL

symptoms were worrying but she didn't speak of them, nor did we discuss my problems, slight as they were in comparison. There seemed to be no time.

The spare bed was again brought into use when a woman was brought in one night, escorted by two policemen. She had fallen in St Helier and banged her head. The nurse who helped her to undress found that her clothes were held together with over a hundred safety pins.

Her stay was brief. In the morning, very early, she was up and safely dressed. She said her name was Lily, she was discharging herself, and she offered to post our letters.

There was no privacy in the little ward, nor could there be without room to accommodate screens. Because there was no privacy, there was no embarrassment and a natural courtesy prevailed. Nevertheless, Lily's safety pins were remarked and commented on for several days, and we were left to surmise that they were her stock-in-trade, because if the German Occupation were to go on long enough even safety pins would have their barter value.

Lily was short and plump, had smooth black hair and very red lips. She was as bright-eyed and glossy as a blackbird. I was sorry to see her go.

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I had been four weeks at the General Hospital. To a large extent I had become accustomed to lying in the plaster. The early discomforts had been alleviated and I was no longer afraid of being unable to cope. A psychological factor which I was never to overcome was the difficulty I found in asserting myself while lying flat on my bed. It was not an unusual phenomenon, after all no one sits higher than the king. In conversation,

thoughtful people brought their heads closer to mine simply by sitting down. By contrast the policemen in the night looked extra tall, as did Canon Cohu in his robes when he stopped by my bed. In some circumstances, this could be intimidating.

People are of the greatest interest to long stay patients, not in any nosy or critical way, but that they seemed to carry an added dimension which is complemented by the patient's heightened sensibilities. People became larger than life and had an added lustre. Visitors from outside brought with them a glamour, a trickery of light and shade, hot sunshine or rain on the wind. They brought these invisibles into the little ward where they were quickly dissipated but not lost, the message received and understood.

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The General Hospital had discharged its duty towards me. I was taking up a bed. The question now arose as to where I might be nursed for a year at least. It seemed I had three options.

The first was to be nursed at home. Apart from the impracticalities, I had a nightmare vision of myself lying in bed at home, unable to move, and full of frustration and self pity. While it was quite acceptable to me to be on full bed attention in hospital, to be waited on literally hand and foot at home would, I felt, have been a humiliation. I was young enough to want to present myself as normal, without disabilities, to be seen by my family and friends only when I was fit to be seen and all indignities screened away from the unsuspecting visitor. My aversion to being nursed at home probably stemmed from a lack of self-confidence, but I had been made sensitive by my condition and chose to play the role of a

latter-day Snow White rather than risk offending the proprieties of the time.

The second option was to enter a nursing home and neither did this idea commend itself. Apart from the cost which would have been quite considerable, I again saw myself alone and sometimes lonely. There is a difference. There was always the chance, I thought, that in such a small establishment an antipathy might arise (either mutual or otherwise) with a member of the staff, in which case I would have no redress. This was later to happen at Overdale, but with a very much larger staff than in a nursing home, its damaging effect was somewhat lessened.

The third option was to enter Overdale Isolation Hospital. They were willing to accept me. I would be where the experts were should any adjustment need to be made to my plaster, and I had already found a certain satisfaction in hospital routine, however irksome on occasions.

While I mulled over these choices and made my decision, my father and Ruby were also weighing up the pros and cons.

At last, in the little space the area around my bed afforded (my father stood at the foot of the bed and Ruby perched somewhere between the bedhead and the windowsill) and with a total lack of privacy, we held a family conference.

We had each done our homework, though naturally my father and Ruby had access to more information. They looked rather anxious. Without any ifs or buts I said I would like to go to Overdale. There were smiles all round.

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## Overdale 'B' Ward

I knew nothing of Overdale except for the name. It suggested a quiet place or rural retreat where people hoped to be nursed slowly back to health. I could not have been more accurate in that assumption.

Overdale Isolation Hospital, to give it its correct name, specialised in the treatment of infections and fevers, the most common being scarlet fever and diphtheria. Apart from times of epidemic the word 'isolation' was almost a misnomer, as most of the patients had TB, and visiting hours were similar to those at the General Hospital.

The number of patients at Overdale with pulmonary tuberculosis, or consumption as it was more commonly called, grew steadily throughout the Occupation. The orthopaedic cases, of which I was one, never numbered more than six. In normal circumstances, many of the patients whose lungs were affected would have had the choice of remaining in their own homes, but it was felt, as food and fuel were likely to become more and more scarce, that they stood a better chance in hospital. For anyone whose lungs were seriously affected the chances were slim whether they were at home or in hospital, a 'better chance' being relative to no chance at all, except for a miracle. I have personal knowledge of a miracle, when a young man lay dying, his family gathered around his bed; and then against all expectations he began to

improve, and later made a good recovery. A miracle is only a miracle because of its rarity, but as no-one can foresee the future who is to know that it will not happen to them?

One of the approaches to Overdale was by way of a hill to the west of St Helier, known appropriately as Westmount. It is very steep with several sharp twists and turns. Westmount was once called Gallows Hill. A gibbet was erected for public executions on a patch of high ground at the last bend before the summit. Such public hangings were prohibited in 1907 – not so very long ago. If cycling downhill, this particular bend, almost encircling the spot where the gallows once stood, was very dangerous, but accidents seldom happened there. An intimation of premature death could stare one in the face in other guises than execution. Continuing after this last bend the hill rose in more gentle fashion until a turn to the left brought one to tall wrought iron gates, the name Overdale spanning the top as part of the design structure.

Overdale had all the ambience of a cottage hospital in ideal surroundings. The hospital complex stood on a slope facing south-west, overlooking St Aubin's Bay. Its layout was extremely modern in 1940, consisting of single storey self-contained units linked by covered walk-ways. By today's standards, such a design would be an extravagance, as would be the quite extensive gardens. The priorities were light, air and space. I believe that Overdale is to be redeveloped. The buildings are old and no doubt lacking in facilities, but I wonder if the same priorities will still apply.

The hospital was run on very strict lines and subscribed to excellence. Matron, two sisters and five nurses made up the staff together with probationer nurses. The total number of patients seldom exceeded seventy. Nurses were fever trained. Scrupulous attention

## OVERDALE 'B' WARD

to hygiene was the method used to prevent transmission of infection from one patient to another, or from one ward to another. In cases of pulmonary TB nurses were advised only that close contact was to be avoided. It was a poor defence and some nurses did contract TB, though most, during the course of nursing, acquired a natural immunity.

Patients were accommodated either in a ward unit or in a unit comprising a row of cubicles fronted by an open verandah. The units had no specific names, the cubicles called either Top Cubicles or Lower Cubicles and the wards given an initial letter to denote the present use.

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I was transferred from the General Hospital to Overdale by ambulance. My first impressions, limited to a view from the stretcher, were of lawns and flower beds bright with colour. I was carried along a glass covered passage with open sides. Double doors led on to the ward. I was not to know that, eighteen months later, I would leave Overdale in the same manner. It would be midwinter then, the flower beds empty and my present confidence and optimism of a more nervous and cautious kind.

The ward to which I was admitted was known as "B" Ward. In complete contrast to the little ward at the General Hospital, here the effect was of light and airy space. Tall louvred windows were ranged on each side the full length of the ward. Cream walls reflected the light, and a red blanket folded across the foot of each bed made bright splashes of colour. Vases of flowers on a refectory style table formed a light screen between one side of the ward and the other. The windows were open wide. It was high summer.

## OVERDALE 'B' WARD

Everyone was having tea when I first arrived. I looked at the other patients and felt that they looked at me. The little ward at the General Hospital had had a sheltering effect, and it was like being a shy child again at a party. It was inhibiting to be lying down when others were free to move about. It became more important to be accepted.

'B' Ward was subdivided into a general ward and two 'side wards' which were actually cubicles at the far end separated by a wide passage leading on to a covered verandah. Two days after arrival I was moved into one of these side wards. Whether I was more easily managed there or if (being non-infectious) it was for my own protection I was not sure; one was never told such things. All I knew was that it was the first time in nearly six weeks that I was alone, and I relished it.

My door was always open and I tried to catch the atmosphere of the ward proper which on the whole seemed cheerful, if subdued. I could just see the last bed in it and Mrs Feuillet propped high on her pillows. She was very ill but managed to raise her hand and smile now and then.

The side ward opposite was kept for special use, which almost invariably meant that its occupant was too ill to remain in the ward. I found it difficult not to dwell on the fact.

Emily was the first patient to introduce herself to me. She was to become my courier and purveyor of news. A tall thin figure in pink cossack-style pyjamas, she would suddenly appear at my door. She always refused to come in, insisting that Sister was on her rounds and might catch her out of bed, but she would not leave without telling me the 'news'. It might be that a particular patient's temperature was up, or that Sister had had a row with Cook, or a description of a new patient. Then she would say 'Is there anything you want, Peggy my

love?'. I would say 'No, thank you' and she would give me a wide grin.

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Not all the patients on "B" Ward were seriously ill. There were those who, having had pleurisy, came into hospital to take advantage of the benefits offered, such as good food, now unavailable outside. These patients would remain for perhaps three months or so; they were forever talking about going home; they lived by the calendar, ticking off the days as if they needed some proof of the passage of time.

All of the patients, apart from Emily and Mrs Feillet, were disembodied voices until I learned to know them one by one, by reputation, or happier still if they should pass my door.

Every patient who spoke to me stood at the door, no-one ventured in. I realised that my separateness was for my protection. I was effectively isolated from the rest of the ward, not because of any infection I might carry to others, but because of the absence of it.

Little by little I grew to know the nursing staff. Because of the German occupation, the nursing staff were almost as captive as the patients, and a source of mutual interest. Some close friendships were made, kept under wraps, and taken up again after the War. The reasons why some nurses on short term contracts had remained in the Island at the time of the evacuation can only be surmised. Some, no doubt, would have preferred to leave, but nurses were in a peculiar position and late decisions could, quite simply, have been overtaken by events.

Staff nurses wore the uniform of the often very prestigious hospitals where they had trained. Dresses

were in the correct colours and caps distinctive with their different pleats and folds.

Sister Secker was one step below Matron. Her rule was law, but she was neither gimlet-eyed nor a tyrant. Calm and pleasant, she appeared never to hurry. She was tall and moved quietly, the diamond shaped folds of her white organza headdress lifting gently behind her.

The nurses on "B" Ward tended to remain the same. Nurse Butlin and Nurse Thomas were the staff nurses and were responsible for junior staff. Sister Secker presided over all. Sister Kelly, small and thin as a bird, was infrequently attached to our ward, so I never got to know her. She had a reputation for being acerbic.

The merest hint of Sister Kelly's approach sent Emily scurrying back to her bed in the approved manner. Her showmanship was never at fault. I wonder what the 'Emily' behind the clown was really like. She had known tragedy. One of her children had died, a little girl aged three.

Nurse Butlin was brisk and efficient. She didn't actually run everywhere, but she gave the impression that she did. I looked forward to her presence. Nurses never had time to talk to patients so we had to enjoy their company en passant. Nurse Butlin could make outrageous remarks; she could also make someone laugh at the same time as she was delivering a home truth. Petty grievances flew out of the window and everything brightened up a little. Nurse Thomas was Welsh and moved more slowly than Nurse Butlin, but with equal purpose. Sometimes she sang 'David of the White Rock' for us. In nearly all ways she was the direct opposite of Nurse Butlin, but both were equally kind and I owe them much.

Each day, during the morning, Matron Scott would make her visit. She came unaccompanied, a slight figure,

walking slowly with the aid of a stick. In striking contrast to the staff, her gown and headdress were of brown silk, as severe in style as a nun's habit. She was the most important person in the hospital, though I mention her last.

'How are you today?'

'Very well, thank you Matron.'

Her smile was kindly, the distance between us enormous.

Her question and my answer never varied. I wondered how the other patients responded to Matron's enquiry. How did Emily respond? How did someone who was dying respond? In exactly the same way as I had, I have no doubt. Matron was perceived to be a benign figure, but remote. She was part of a hierarchy.

I had no knowledge of the administrative side of the hospital, but I knew that its excellence was maintained in our very difficult circumstances and that Matron's position was of crucial importance. Nevertheless, the hospital would not have existed but for the patients, and how I wish I had had the opportunity to talk sometimes with Matron, not as a means of making a complaint, as many might, but so as to have looked forward to her visits instead of readying myself for a visit that never was, and which became, or so it seemed, merely an untimely intrusion into the morning's orderly routine.

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Overdale possessed the very essence of timelessness. The days passed in slow procession, sedately in, sedately out. Although I have suggested that such a feeling of timelessness was sometimes induced in the little ward at the General Hospital, there the atmosphere of a busy

hospital was always apparent, but here there was no underlying sense of urgency or change. Only those enervated by their disease would have escaped the awareness of being set aside from any disturbance, pleasurable or otherwise; set aside from the mainstream of life itself. The effects of the War were, of course, all around us, but not demonstrably so. I was not to see a German soldier until January 1943.

Overdale was indeed a retreat, the gentle quietude broken only by the inevitable coughing. I was neither happy nor unhappy. I was cocooned in a little world eight feet square.

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Visitors broke the spell. Visiting hours were short, limited to two hours or less on Thursday and Sunday afternoons. Visitors tended to overlap and it was difficult to arrange any kind of private conversation, but I gave up longing for such a closeness when I realised that all conversations, even with Ruby, were likely to be the same. It was an exercise called 'We won't tell Peggy, she might be upset.' Why, I wondered, should I not be upset? My searching questions were turned aside, everything in the garden was lovely.

Surely the Occupation continued in its crippling effect? Surely the Germans could, at any time, 'show the iron heel' (an expression of my father's)? Surely there was hardship and discomfort and other personal worries at home? The trials of life would seem to be, for the Still family, a closed book.

*The Evening Post* provided a partial view of the real world. Although controlled by the Germans, it was sometimes possible to read between the lines; but the

news in the *Evening Post* was the general, not the particular.

It was time to take myself in hand if I wanted to avoid falling into a state of apathy. Instead of accepting the day-by-day hospital routine I decided to impose my own disciplines by dividing up the day and devoting certain activities to those times.

Reading has always been my pleasure, but what I wanted then was to have that pleasure deferred, so as to have something to look forward to each day. Reading simply in order to fill time was not at all the same thing as knowing that I had to make time for it, and the pleasurable feeling of knowing that the books were there waiting for me. So the greatest discipline was to make it a rule never to open a book until after lunch, or until I had made satisfactory progress on other projects. The options for these were limited to two. I could write or I could knit. I decided to compile a cookery book from memory and to attempt some knitting. I simply had to stop each day's tiny events from being the markers of time. My aim was to become greedy for time.

Curiously, it was the difficulties which these projects presented that made them interesting. Any project needing paper had to be carefully thought out. It was always possible to find a little writing paper somewhere, but one could not afford to waste it. All my rough drafts were made in the margins of old magazines. Also, the wool for the knitting had to be found, it couldn't be bought. It was salvaged from old pullovers, good in parts, or from discarded long woollen socks, the feet beyond darning. Often the wool that was useable had to be split along its length to make the correct ply for the work in mind. It was a challenge to make a pair of socks or gloves worthy of the name from such unmentionables, and more important, to feel that it was not entirely

## OVERDALE 'B' WARD

wasted effort, such items being sought after. Because of my supine state I could only manage small articles.

The nights at Overdale were, of necessity, a time of contemplation. The patients in the ward were exhausted by their disease at the end of the day, but I felt well and had nothing to tire me.

Curfew was strictly enforced between the hours of 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. On those still summer nights, the silence could be almost absolute, with not even the sound of a car changing gear on the hill, or the distant barking of a dog. The only barely heard footfall would be that of the night nurse making her rounds.

Those periods of utter silence were thankfully broken by the chiming of the hours from the clocks in each of three church steeples. They never rang in unison; their distinctive sounds followed one after the other, possibly because of the distortion of sound over distance but more probably due to their slight inaccuracies. First to be heard was the town church of St Helier with its rich, mellow notes; next the Roman Catholic Church of St Thomas, lighter and more delicate with something like a carillon about it, and lastly the Church of St Saviour, out of town and a little farther away on its hill, with its homely sound of being a little off key.

Sometimes I would fall asleep towards dawn only to be awakened by the night nurse shining her torch in my face. With no lights allowed, I expect she needed to have a good look at us to make sure we had survived the night. There were grumbles from very much alive patients but it made no difference to her thoroughness.

\*

Paul Boléat was a member of the Amateur Dramatic Club, a club which flourished all through the

Occupation, putting on plays regularly at the Opera House in St Helier, but that is by the way. Earlier in the year I had joined the club; I cannot now think why, as I have never had any inclination to be part of a group. My participation would always be a politeness, a willingness to join in while at the same time an inability to enter into the real spirit of the occasion. In this instance it was not a lack of confidence, more a lack of any natural acting ability and, on the social side, a preference for more personal friendships.

With the onset of my illness, any good intentions I may have had with regard to the club were, in any case, quickly dashed. The club members very kindly came to visit me. They made their polite gestures and left. Paul came often to visit. Having introduced me to the Club I thought he might feel under some moral obligation to visit me, and said as much. He deprecated the idea that I didn't need to see him, and became a constant friend.

Our relationship was slight. We had been out together just a few times before my illness took over my thinking, my aspirations and to some extent my attitudes.

I had few topics of interest to bring into a conversation unless they were hospital orientated, and from Paul's point of view I was soon out of touch with Jersey's social scene or club affairs. The pleasure that we had in each other's company was that we were both 'book' people, and being so there were a hundred doors to open and all the time in the world.

Second-hand bookshops flourished in St Helier. What would have been empty premises could quickly become interesting and productive businesses in a time of want. Books were not only read and lost editions searched for, but were an extremely marketable commodity. A sought-after book could be bartered for a pair of shoes for the shopkeeper or one of his family. The same shoes

might later be bartered for more books which could then be bartered .... There would always be someone who, even in a time of need, would value a book above a bag of grain.

Paul was my research librarian as well as a friend. It was a happy state of affairs. Paul sent me flowers because he knew I liked them, and he brought me books because he liked them and enjoyed browsing in bookshops. We got along very well.

\*

It was a strange paradox, lying in bed with a serious disease and yet feeling in good health. Sometimes I would try to plot the foreseeable future. It was Autumn and I was due for an X-ray. I would go to the General Hospital for a few days. It would be quite an adventure. And what of my progress? Would I be told the result of my X-ray? Probably not, but if I asked, the answer would surely be 'satisfactory'. It was too soon for there to be much improvement but 'satisfactory' would surely mean no worsening of the disease. I would be happy with that.

These and similar thoughts returned again and again in the small hours, aided by the fact that I slept fitfully, and because I was unable to move, I was often disturbed by pains in my legs attributed to nervous tension.

When morning came and my now organised day I could see these night thoughts as unprofitable, but for the whole time that I was in hospital I never managed to banish them entirely.

In November, I went to the General Hospital for X-ray and after two weeks I ventured to ask Sister Secker for details. I had quickly come to realise that patients were excluded from any discussion about their disease or any proposed treatment. Mentally I rehearsed the words I

would use in forming my request, and I waited for the moment when I judged that Sister would be most disposed to listen to me; her mood was sometimes stormy, never obviously so, but we in the ward had gained a perception that could tell a storm far out at sea by a single ripple at the water's edge.

I thought I had chosen my moment well. Sister lingered by my bed and we spoke for a few minutes in a friendly way and then, as calmly as I was able, I made my request for information. Sister straightened up. 'Patients are not told whether their X-rays are good, bad or indifferent' she said briskly and moved away from me and into the ward, allowing for no reasoned argument.

Mr Halliwell made quarterly visits. The first of these since leaving the General Hospital had been in October when my X-ray was arranged. If, on his visit, he had sat down and discussed my illness with me, I would not have felt so let down. Instead, accompanied by Sister, he spoke to me for a few minutes on inconsequential subjects, Sister told him that I was doing very well, he smiled charmingly, and they moved away.

Etiquette prevented me from asking any pertinent questions of Mr Halliwell. I could only have asked Sister if she would ask for me. It went much further than that. Should one wish to ask Sister about a less important matter, one would first ask a staff nurse if she would approach Sister. Many months later I took great pleasure in breaking with this tradition.

I should describe Mr Halliwell. He was the Consultant Surgeon at the General Hospital and I was one of his patients. He was a tall, thin man with a fair complexion. Immaculate would be the word which best describes the chief impression he gave. This impression was emphasised by the light grey suits of fine cloth that he wore and by his glasses, which seemed to gleam with

cleanliness. He fitted exactly my idea of how a surgeon should look.

Despite possessing great charm, of which he later showed a little, he was also aloof as befitted the exalted position held by surgeons in those days. In a drawn cartoon, I could see him depicted as an elegant pair of scissors.

\*

December 12th 1941 was my nineteenth birthday and I was given a fried egg for breakfast. It was placed dead centre on a dessert plate, and "Happy Birthday" was written around the rim in blue.

What was the significance of the fried egg? It was an out and out luxury, deserving of a decorated plate, and an exceedingly pleasant surprise for anyone receiving it. The egg may have come by way of the kitchen, as hospitals had some priorities where food distribution was concerned; indeed we did have scrambled eggs (a pale amorphous mass) for breakfast occasionally, but I preferred to believe that my egg was new-laid and negotiated for.

I am not romancing; if I were, the tests and trials besetting the prince in search of his prize would be as nothing to the search for an egg in December during the Occupation.

The Germans had their eyes on poultry keepers; there were requisitions and controls and there were returns to be made. Subtlety was employed by farmers and others, as a matter of course, in complying with these regulations.

It was one thing to sequester some laying pullets, but it was now midwinter and daylight hours were short for the birds to feed. There was a shortage of grain; there was

much thieving in the countryside and the birds had to be protected, and there was always a risk because the birds were being kept illegally.

So eggs were much sought after and more generally obtained by barter. They were desired, as something that gave perfect and complete satisfaction. Even the famed discipline of the German army was called into question when, against orders, some German soldiers tried to bribe farmers with tobacco in exchange for a few eggs.

I enjoyed my egg. It was something special and not to be repeated during the two years I was in hospital.

Visitors spoke of rumour and of shortages. Rumour was one of the mainstays of the Jersey population. In its way it was food for the mind as were the ingenious ways of providing food for the body. The word 'ersatz', meaning 'substitute for', was in everyone's vocabulary.

\*

The *Jersey Evening Post* provided general news coverage under German restrictions. When there was no shortage of newsprint, it arrived daily in its usual format. I had my own personal copy and it was one of the day's highlights when it arrived after tea. Its content was adjusted to the conditions with some of the usual features being given a subtle twist.

Because of the type of humour in which the ward indulged – hospital humour, off-beat humour, call it what you will, the reports of funerals in the *Evening Post* are what I remember most. It was as if they had taken over the society pages. Every funeral, it seemed, was covered lavishly, many column inches and even whole pages being given over to a detailed description of the occasion; the church, the form of service, the flowers, those attending, and every person named. Thus, on 'B' Ward, if anyone

felt a little low, the *Evening Post* would be offered with a flourish, the recipient assured that the accounts of the funerals were bound to assist in the cheering up process.

\*

'When she awoke it was night, and the room was in almost total darkness. She was lying on a bed of some kind. In some inexplicable way her lower limbs had been rendered useless and a dull ache seized her spine.....' A promising beginning for a psychological thriller, is it not? And how does the heroine of this proposed tale react to her predicament? The door to her room is closed and she feels she has been abandoned; if she calls out, no-one will hear; but they did say they would come back for her, they did promise that. If only it were not so dark she could see the time by her watch. How many hours until morning? If the pain that encircled her waist as in a vice would ease a little she could view the situation more rationally. If she could just manage to stand she might be able to move, inch by inch, towards the door. How many hours until morning? Her brain cautions silence but her instinct is to shout 'Get me out of here!'

'Good morning, Peggy. How are you this morning?'

'Good morning, Nurse. My back aches a little.'

Nothing but night terrors, but not of the screaming and raving kind. Just a hint as to how the unease I experienced whenever I was out of contact with another living person could, on the very rare occasions when assistance was needed and not forthcoming, reach 'thriller' proportions.

Such a sense of abandonment is a desolation of the spirit. It is all in the mind and there is no logical reason for it; from the child left alone at the school gate when all his or her schoolmates have been fetched and taken

home, to the adult standing in the arrivals hall of a strange airport and slowly realising that the person who was to have met them is unlikely ever to turn up; at sometime in our lives we have all experienced the sensation and, except in the case of tragedy, it has always been without foundation. The application of common sense does not quell this basic instinct, it simply suppresses it enough for one's behaviour to remain civilised.

Being physically helpless made me more vulnerable to such feelings. They were rare, fortunately, and always had their beginnings in pain or discomfort of one kind or another.

Patients are cosseted these days as never before. They may not necessarily feel less ill but they have the means to provide distraction and, if necessary, to summon assistance. On a recent short-stay in the General Hospital, I was able to telephone, watch television, listen to radio, adjust the lighting and, most important of all, I could call a nurse.

If I have suggested otherwise, I must make it plain that there were always staff on night duty at Overdale, though there were periods when one nurse covered the whole hospital. The night nurse made her rounds, not quite the lady with the lamp, but the lady with the one available torch, and there were long hours between her visits.

In the small hours it was tempting to imagine that I might, like my fictional heroine, 'just manage to stand' by undoing my restraints and saying 'to hell with it', or even just move a little in my bed. The latter would have been possible but was never more than an idle thought because I had absolute faith in that the treatment, if followed to the letter, would work.

\*

Christmas Eve 1941 was an ordinary day but we sang carols after lights out. Our repertoire was soon exhausted, as were the patients' voices. Emily suggested that we sang 'Christians Awake, salute the Happy Morn' which caused some hilarity as it was only 8 p.m. The ward settled down. Much later, Sister Secker came and left stockings containing little presents on our beds. It was so unexpected that I was overcome with sentiment.

Christmas Day does not stay in my memory, but on Boxing Day after lunch, my bed was moved into the ward. There were decorations and funny hats and someone put a red paper ribbon in my hair. We were to have a concert. I believe that the concert was made up of extracts from the pantomime 'Little Red Riding Hood' playing at the Opera House. The members of the cast must have struggled up Westmount, props and finery piled on their bicycles on a raw December day in order to entertain us. They received our thanks and more. A tea party followed with visitors allowed.

My father arrived in a dark suit I had not seen before, and when I asked him about it, he said that he usually wore it for funerals. I have to say that this kind of unintentional humour was seized upon, embellished and then became part of our stock-in-trade. I was not aware that my father attended many funerals, but by the end of 1943 I came to realise that many a deal was struck in a closed horse-drawn carriage on the way to a funeral. Where better to discuss business away from the prying eyes of the Germans? I am ashamed to say that my father was once so engrossed in the barter process that he misdirected the coachman and arrived at the wrong cemetery.

Back alone in my cubicle after tea, the afternoon and the concert still cast their glow, as did the vision of my father – in his dark suit.

\*

It was New Year's Day, and 1942 seemed full of promise. I had passed the half-way mark of my year in plaster. I had done everything asked of me, and somewhere, surely, a medal was already being struck. Was I really so naive as to imagine that when the year was over I would get up from my bed and walk out of the hospital, cured? Probably not, but it never entered my head that I might not recover.

The mood among all the patients was optimistic. A description of their plight would read like a horror-story today, but I cannot remember anyone suffering from depression despite there being circumstances enough. Even Emily did not include depression among her accomplishments. We were all young, and most of us had never heard of the word. Some people became frightened and feared for their future, with reason, and they were comforted. All of us needed privacy from time to time, either for meditation or for prayer. The way to obtain solitude was to feign sleep all day and the nurses, with understanding, did not intrude. These were always brief interludes however.

I was fortunate in having my cubicle and the privacy it afforded. I was also coming to terms with solitude.

Emily came to my door one day as I was having lunch, and at the same time reading a book. She asked

'Why do you read while you are having your lunch?'

'Because I haven't enough time.'

If I was unsure whether my disciplines had worked, I knew it then.

The days went by at a steady pace but the nights were long, long, long. Strict observance of blackout regulations meant that lights out was at 8 p.m., and we lay in the dark until morning. If windows were open as demanded

by our treatment, curtains would sway, light would show and there would be trouble. The answer was to draw back the curtains at 8 p.m., open windows and extinguish all lights. The night nurse alone was permitted a torch.

There was some desultory talk after lights out, or someone might start a song, but the ward was soon quiet and I would find myself anticipating the first bout of coughing.

It was during one of those long winter nights that I made landfall on my island. I have always loved the beaches, the rocks and the sea; the friendliness of an incoming tide and the loneliness of its retreating. I had not yearned for them while in hospital but perhaps the sub-conscious need was very strong.

Of course there was no island, but in my imagination it became as real as if it were my own place with my own cottage among the dunes. As I mounted the foreshore I could hear the crunch of the shingle, and feel the pebbles slide away beneath my feet. There was that peculiar, almost acrid smell of dry *vraic* strewn above the tideline.

The Island was of the kind found among the Channel Islands, because these I knew and could savour, while any other island would have been a fantasy. On my island I knew the scent of the gorse blossom and could watch the granite walls of my cottage turn to rose on a summer evening, and feel the warmth of those walls against my back. But when I first arrived it was still winter and during a time of quiet and cold weather, as is not unusual for the period just after Christmas. The sun shone from a pale blue sky. For several days each low tide exposed tangled masses of shiny brown ribbon fronds and bladder *vraic*, overflowing the gullies of the lower shore; but the gales out at sea which had torn them from their holdfasts and swept them inshore were not here. Here was a stretch

of gleaming sand, where gulls stood idly, making their own reflections in the newly washed surface, in this quiet time of peace and tranquillity.

My cottage provided basic accommodation, and over the next six months I settled in. In bad weather I kept my household accounts, arranged for supplies and designed improvements to make the cottage more habitable. On fine days the possibilities were endless. There was very little leisure on the island and I always had a list of chores for when I next visited.

I had no wish for company, either human or animal, no wish to hear another voice, no wish to stroke soft fur. The Island provided all my needs.

The sense of reality and the imagery never faded, as at first I thought it might. The island was always there .... still, I treated it as treasure in store and I carefully spaced my visits.

Many years later and during a particularly trying period in my life, I set my thoughts on the island of my imagination, hoping for a response, but there was nothing there. It was an old love, folded now and put away, having served its purpose.

\*

March arrived and daffodils appeared in the ward and in my room, bringing indoors some of the freshness of the blustery weather. The news from home was of shortages and how to overcome them. Instead of a car, our garage now housed rabbits. My father tended them, and it was Michael's job, every day after school, to fill a sack with milk thistle, dandelion and the like. Every hedgerow sprouted rabbit food and the countryside began almost at our front door, but Michael on his bicycle was one of many engaged in this form of foraging,

and every day he was obliged to go farther and farther afield to fill his bag, and with less and less enthusiasm. Sometimes he failed to go at all and then there would be a row. Ruby pretended that there were no rabbits in the garage, for sentimental reasons, but was ready to receive an oven-ready rabbit at the kitchen door, when she cooked a superb dish, so I was told.

Foraging in the fields and hedgerows had an idealistic ring to it, and I would have wished myself there but for the wind and the rain of those early March days. Obviously, a dish of baked rabbit did not come easily.

I had no part in the exigencies of daily living, the scrounging and the effort involved to maintain a household.

At Overdale, the basic rations were served up as part of our diet. Semolina pudding appeared again and again. I do not recall it with any distaste so cook must have used her considerable skill. To supplement the meagre meat ration the hospitals were provided with the offal. We were served cheeks, tongues (large and small), hearts, tripes, tails and a few unidentifiable parts of animals, all cooked to a stew. My stomach cringed most mealtimes. Pressure was put on us to overcome these dislikes. Later on we were exhorted to think of the starving Russians. They could have had mine anytime.

Ruby was concerned. Next visiting day, she brought a friend who had a present for me. It was a bottle of Lea & Perrin's Worcester Sauce. 'Take it, my dear' said this lady. 'It will take the taste out of anything'.

\*

In May 1942 I was again booked for X-ray and looked forward to it with some anxiety. In the ward, whenever someone went for treatment of whatever kind,

the sympathetic comment was always 'So-and-so is for the high jump today'. It was a good analogy. The butterflies were already fluttering.

This time my usual three day visit to the General Hospital had its highlight. On arrival in the hospital forecourt I was lowered from the ambulance on a raised stretcher, placed on the ground and, by some oversight, left there for half an hour.

The forecourt was a very busy place and this was entertainment. The sun shone and I was happy to take everything in. One or two people came over and spoke to me. I could have stayed there all day.

Later I heard that the Matron at Overdale had made a complaint to the General Hospital about the treatment of one of her patients who had been left unattended on the hospital forecourt for a considerable time. I smiled to hear of it with much remembered pleasure.

On that visit I found that much more stress was laid on 'making do' at The General Hospital. Tea, with added milk, was brought round in glass tumblers well scratched from long use. I did not drink tea, so it was easy to refuse it. I did eat, though, and my appetite fading, I asked for a silver-plated fork and spoon to be brought from home rather than use the battered hospital tableware. I wonder now whether they considered me a snob. I caused a considerable amount of trouble in any case because my personal fork and spoon disappeared and Ruby, with great nerve, ransacked the cavernous hospital kitchens until they were found.

\*

In June 1942 the Department of Health began a programme of vaccination against smallpox. Dr McKinstry, our Medical Officer of Health, walked down

the ward one morning and, in a loud voice so that we could all hear, advised Sister that 'Our patients have quite enough to put up with, without vaccination'. We were let off more than we knew because the vaccine was crude and caused severe reactions in some people.

Dr Mac, as he was affectionately known, always stopped on his rounds to talk to me for a few minutes although I was not on his list. He would however routinely take blood from me and with a surprising lack of expertise. He would then move on, muttering to Sister about 'people with thick skins who blunt my needles'.

Dr Mac seemed to think I was making progress, because on one occasion he said to Sister that if he could put lungs in plaster there would be many more cures. Sister's smile, added to his remarks, gave me a quite unfounded sense of well-being.

What power a few words could have, especially to anyone made sensitive by his or her physical condition. Yet we reacted with careless laughter when Emily, scurrying through the ward, brought out the current joke once again :

'It isn't the cough that carries you off,  
It's the coffin they carry you off in.'

I was out of sight of the ward, in my cubicle, and could not always know to whom the joke was addressed. I only knew that I was one of the lucky ones and the words could not strike home. These words made me wince, but the joke was comic enough, Emily's telling of it always well timed for maximum effect. Was it the fact that, as nobody took Emily seriously, therefore the joke would always end in laughter? However it was, such jokes, in a paradoxical way, were relished.

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## OVERDALE 'B' WARD

One of the patients in the top cubicles was interested in graphology and asked for examples of handwriting. I sent mine along. The top cubicles, as the name suggests, were a row of cubicles situated on the highest ground of the Overdale complex. Their occupants were male patients, most of whom had TB. Anyone may have thought that there were no male patients at Overdale. We were so strictly segregated that the men might have been a thousand miles away as far as we were concerned.

A week later, I had a letter from Dennis, the graphologist, smuggled in by Nurse Thomas. Dennis asked if I would be a pen friend. Nurse Thomas thought it a good idea, 'but don't get involved because he is not well', and she added 'Don't let Sister know or I will be in trouble'.

Nurse Thomas undertook to deliver my letters to Dennis, tucking them into the bib of her apron as if they were billets doux. His replies were few and became fewer. It was too late in Dennis' life for small beginnings. My lightweight letters did not accord with the times, his times. Soon we only exchanged verbal messages via Nurse Thomas.

A few months later, I heard that Dennis had died. We never met, but his death, so casually mentioned in my hearing, made me very sad. With any human contact there is always some involvement.

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Our Purchasing Commission in St Malo expecting olive oil, found they had bought olives, not in dainty jars but in bulk. Many of us had tall glass jars of green olives on our lockers. At any other time a casual observer might have wondered what bizarre dietary treatment these patients were receiving. We ate them between meals, like

## OVERDALE 'B' WARD

sweets. When the jars became empty the novelty had quite worn off.

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Towards the end of June 1942 I at last had news of my latest X-ray. 'No change.' I was not as disappointed as I imagined I would be – more philosophical maybe. I set my sights on the autumn.

\*

A new patient arrived at the end of June. Her name was Margot Norman.

I wonder why it is so much easier to write about disappointments and privations from the great to the trivial, but when something very pleasant indeed happens and words should flow across the page, there are inhibitions. How to describe the extraordinary friendship that Margot and I enjoyed over the next six months, the shared pleasures and the shared anxieties? It is an impossibility.

Margot and I would have been friendly in any circumstances. We were on the same wavelength, as they say. Our friendship was speeded up and enhanced by the condition in which we found ourselves, and most important was the fact that, unlike our visitors, neither of us could leave the hospital, to go flying away down the hill until another visiting day.

I first met Margot on a quiet afternoon. She came to my door, a tall figure in a blue dressing gown, escorted by a nurse. We were introduced. Afterwards, I held a picture of dark, waving hair, a glowing complexion, glasses, a contralto voice. That had to suffice, because after our brief meeting Margot was confined to bed and we did not

see each other again until the autumn. Margot occupied the side ward opposite which meant that there were two walls and ten feet of passageway between us.

Emily became our messenger. She hastened between our rooms, always afraid she might be caught out of bed when she should be in it. She often was caught, and her typical remark was 'I met Sister in the hall and she just shut her eyes on me.'

Despite the problems, Margot and I became great sharers of ideas and, more practically, of our visitors, the biscuits they brought us and the very important 'news'. We once even shared a pair of Margot's father's pyjamas; 'Pa's pies' she called them.

I was needful of the pyjama top. My nightdresses were in danger of turning into well laundered rags. A nurse asked 'Would you like to wear our hospital gowns at night, and keep yours for daytime?'

'Yes please.'

I was happy to wear the simple white cotton nightgowns until one evening when one of the probationer nurses came, almost running, to my room.

'Have you put on that clean white nightdress yet?'

'No' – it was lying on the radiator, still neatly folded.

'Do you think I could have it back? One of our patients is likely to die in the night, and we might need it to lay her out.'

\*

For all of two months, before Margot had to rest more and lie quietly in her bed, our friendship flourished. Margot had a lively temperament, verging on the ebullient, and though I was of a somewhat quieter nature, during this time I matched her in high spirits as in

a happy homecoming after long absence. The last year, almost without my knowing it, had been a lonely one.

We could neither see nor speak to each other; we wrote no letters either searching each other's souls or our own; we entertained each other with a flow of ideas taken from our surroundings and translated into art that was surreal in its use of, say, a battered tooth mug or chipped enamel bowl, or, in my case, prose that explored the virtues of such minutiae. Coming down from such a high plane we devised paper and pencil games and compiled crossword puzzles. These we submitted to the *Evening Post* and they published them. I came across one of these puzzles recently whilst perusing old copies of the newspaper. It lay there in front of me, small and neat on the page, a testament to old memories.

For a little while we became as skittish as schoolgirls as when, with Emily's assistance, we rigged up a communication system between our two cubicles with the use of string and a pulley. It was taken down, with admonishments, within the hour, and it would have fitted this scenario for Sister, in the guise of a headmistress, to have descended on us saying 'Girls! Have you taken leave of your senses?'

To all outward appearance we were two unremarkable young women. No sound came from our cubicles where we occupied our beds, the corners of the white counterpanes perfectly turned and exact to the fraction of an inch. Nothing had changed at Overdale, but everything had changed.

\*

Every day after lunch, patients were obliged to take a nap. In no way was this nap discretionary. Pillows were re-arranged, bed covers smoothed and, in my case, books

removed. The hour of the nap was sacrosanct. Even Emily dared not be found out of bed, when she might have restored to me pencil and paper at least. Patients settled into the warm silence of the early afternoon. It was a time to dream of being able to fulfil one's greatest desires.

I gazed at the glass of water on my locker. It was tepid 'bathroom' water and tasted as flat as it looked. It was a drink, that was all.

I idly imagined another drink of cold spring water, another glass of cut crystal, another place. What about a rose garden, I thought, in which to enjoy this wonderful experience. It would be a formal garden of small beds and raked gravel paths. There would be an arbour for shade and old granite walls for privacy. People would be superfluous to this occasion.

I remembered reading a famous author who saw himself, as if in a dream, walking through a market which held everything that man's heart could desire. He was allowed to buy one item only. All his life he had been a collector of old clocks, and he was presented with the most rare and beautiful of these. He lingered, but passed them by. Again and again his attention was caught by articles for sale which he had long coveted, and in this manner he passed through the labyrinth of booths which made up the market. He emerged at last, and in his hand he held an apple.

When I originally read this passage I thought it a little precious. Not so, now that I was indulging in such a dream and practising such a refinement of choice. The author's apple was an entity. My glass of water, running pure and clear, was exactly the same, whatever the packaging.

It was three o'clock and the hour of the nap was over. Footsteps could be heard in the ward. Questions and

answers. There was a visitor.

The visitor was Père Guèrin, the Roman Catholic priest who had made such an impression on me in the little ward at the General Hospital. He was beloved by all, and although I was not a Catholic, he would always stop by my bed. He would ask 'Are you a Catholic?'

'No, Father.'

'I will pray for you, and you must pray for me.'

'Yes, Father.'

We exchanged the same words each time he came. He really was an old man, and in his politeness did not wish to make a mistake. When he became ill, we were all concerned and made him presents of little pots of jam. Strange gifts.

\*

We were well into Summer and one morning there was a surprise for me. It was a wheeled daybed with wicker sides. I was moved into it and taken for a walk in the grounds, then left for a while before being brought back into my room. As I was not to be moved unnecessarily, it was intended that I should remain on the daybed until the end of the summer.

My thoughts are as dull now as they were unenthusiastic then. I, who had longed to go outside to escape from those 'same four walls' positively disliked the wicker carriage, but did not know how to say so. Everyone at Overdale had been very good to me, and I felt I had no option but to say 'thank you'. I languished in this wicker carriage with its claustrophobic sides for two whole months, day and night, until something went wrong with it and I was moved back into my uncluttered, glorious, hospital bed.

\*

Our visitors continued to be a wonder. Whoever came to visit had first of all to reach the foot of Westmount and then climb the hill. Bicycles were the mode of travel, but this still meant a climb on foot.

My father had acquired a large, upright bicycle, and Ruby used my Hercules semi-sports model. Ruby did not adapt her style of dress for riding a bicycle. She still wore silk frocks with many pleats in the skirts and, as it was summer, a Leghorn hat with a wide brim and shallow crown and decorated with ribbons and flowers. The very finest woven straw came from Leghorn in Tuscany, and the hats themselves were simply called 'Leghorns' (pronounced 'le-gorns' with the emphasis on the second syllable).

I often pictured them together on their cycles, my father so upright on his and Ruby on hers, crouched low over the dropped handlebars, and wearing her Leghorn. I wondered if, after visiting me, they dared speed away down the hill. The thought always made me smile.

\*

In August many of us were ill with a form of gastro-enteritis. During the Occupation almost everyone in Jersey suffered from this affliction at one time or another. Malnutrition was supposedly its cause, but not all were malnourished. In fact, some people with delicate digestions became fit and well again on our basic food, which in fact was the high fibre and low fat diet advocated by many doctors today. An egg, as will have been understood, was for birthdays.

When ill, we at Overdale were treated with pills which acted like magic. These pills were known as 'little red

devils' and we, the patients, thought they were opium because of the 'floating away on air' feeling they induced.

I became a victim of this scourge suddenly one visiting day while talking with Mr Mimmack, who had come from his office at 16 Hill Street to visit me. It was 'not done' to ask for a bed-pan during visiting hours. Afterwards, I remembered nothing of my conversation with Mr Mimmack. All concentration was on controlling my symptoms. When the visiting hour was over I wept with pain and frustration but met with little sympathy. I felt I had lost my dignity and the pleasure of Mr Mimmack's company and all because of the prudish manners of the time.

Tears did not come easily to me, but when they did they were of the uncontrollable kind and nearly always due to shock or frustration. There could be nothing histrionic about them, no rushing to one's room to fling oneself on the bed in despair. Lying flat caused my tears to deviate from their normal course, to trickle into my ears and, so it seemed, to belie their importance. Tears were an unsought indulgence.

That particular visiting day ended with a very small drama of a different kind. Mrs Le Gros had been given a bar of Yardley's Lavender soap. Emily, with a solemn tread and as if carrying the Holy Grail, offered each of us this treasure for inspection.

'Would you like to have a smell of Mrs Le Gros' soap, Peggy?'

'Delicious.'

The last time I had used fine toilet soap was in May, on the occasion of my visit to the General Hospital. Anyone for the 'high jump' was offered something special, perhaps soap, scent or someone's best nightdress. There were no hoarders. The less we had, the more we shared.

Toilet soap on ration was far from special. Made locally, it was of a greenish-grey colour and slightly rough to the touch. I did hear that boiled ivy leaves were part of the recipe. The smell was, to my mind, that of abandoned flannels in third rate boarding house bathrooms. I have to say that it worked quite well.

\*

All that summer of 1942 Paul came to see me. Visiting was allowed for one and a half hours each Thursday and Sunday. I could see the point of such restrictions. Most patients' temperatures were up on the evenings of visiting days. Even I, who ran no temperature, was tired. We all put on a show, patients and visitors. The family came to visit on Thursdays. Paul came to see me on Sundays.

Were Paul's visits a delicate and tentative courtship at that time? I will never know. There were so many imponderables. I had TB. Quite outside that, what kind of people were we outside the patient/visitor environment? The War also encompassed us. The invasion of France by the Allies had not yet taken place. The news was sombre. I do not think that anyone doubted the eventual outcome of the War, but the turning point had not yet been reached.

We in the Channel Islands lived in a kind of limbo, and for any would-be lovers there was nothing to fuel wildly unrealistic declarations of love, no feeling that there might not be a tomorrow, no threat of death either in combat or as a result of falling bombs. Our tomorrows passed in the same way as our todays. Now was a non-time, all hopes and desires set firmly in the future 'after the War'.

I looked forward to Sundays.

Apart from some slight attachments and romantic yearnings, I had never had a steady boyfriend. Girls grew up late in the 1930s and were always under a father's strict supervision. It was the norm. Any prospective boyfriend had to run the gauntlet of a father's scrutiny. If one erred, divine wrath was not feared half as much as the wrath of one's father. Fathers have to toe the line now, and bearing in mind the fact that fathers tend to view all boyfriends with suspicion, their restraint is to be commended.

\*

Every evening Emily complained of her insomnia and was given a sleeping powder. It came in a twist of paper. Emily could not sleep without it. Nurse Butlin told me that the sleeping powder was just a pinch of bismuth. Emily mixed the powder with some water, and drank it with ceremony. Needless to say, she slept like a baby.

I do not recall that anyone, except for Emily, was given a sleeping powder. It is ironic that we, with all our problems, were seldom thought to require one. I think we all understood that Emily's need to be seen to be receiving medication was to be indulged. After all, the day would not have been complete without Emily's sleeping powder ritual.

I remember one patient who was very ill. She had a fear of dying in the night and refused to sleep. She was given a sleeping draught with enough potency to knock out four men, but still she stayed awake. She also talked all the time. Before she was removed from the ward, her rampant fear was beginning to affect us all.

If the power of sleep was all in the mind, then so was the power to benefit from anything offered towards one's wellbeing, or the power to negate its health-giving

properties. I used this argument in order to avoid the daily spoonful of fish liver oil, without success.

The oil was extracted locally from a variety of imported fish livers, with little or no refining. It was supplemented with carragheen moss, some of which refused to gell and could be seen lurking as seaweedy fronds within the clear glass jar. There was no smoked glass bottle with a picture of a fisherman or four-masted schooner on the front which might have sent some esoteric message to the brain, and so make its taste more palatable. There was no sweet to take the taste away.

\*

September 15, 1942 began like any other day. I washed, my bed was made, breakfast was served, and afterwards the ward maids came in to clean. Big Lil swept around my bed. As her name suggests, she was a big blowsy woman and she had an unlimited stock of gossip and rumour. No one believed Big Lil's stories, so when she told me that all the English people were going to be deported, I didn't believe her.

After lunch, I was pleased, but not unduly surprised, to see my father at the door of my cubicle. I can see him now. He was wearing a fawn gaberdine raincoat, the raindrops still sparkling on his sleeve, and he was very red in the face from hurrying.

'Listen, Peg', he said, 'I can't stop. I have just come to tell you that we are not going.'

As he left the tears were rolling onto my pillow. It was the shock of belief in what I thought couldn't possibly be true.

It was very quiet in the ward with patients settling down for the afternoon nap, but I could hear the fading sound of Emily's slippers flop-flopping down the passage on her way to spread the news.

## OVERDALE 'B' WARD

Sister and staff soon surrounded me with promises to care for me in my parents' absence. When I was coherent enough to speak, I said 'But they're not going.' There were looks of surprise all around and some raised eyebrows, as if I had nothing to cry about, but I knew it was not so.

*The Evening Post* was delivered later that day. I read the notice it displayed carefully and then laid it aside. Its power to shock and dismay now lessened, incomprehension took its place. The notice read as follows :

### NOTICE

Jersey, den 15 September 1942

By order of Higher Authorities, the following British subjects will be evacuated and transferred to Germany:—

- (a) Persons who have their permanent residence not on the Channel Islands, for instance those who have been caught here by the outbreak of the war.
- (b) All those men not born on the Channel Islands and 16 to 70 years of age who belong to the English people, together with their families. Detailed instructions will be given by the Feldkommandantur 515.

Der Feldkommandant,  
gez. KNACKFUSS  
Oberst.

My father was an Englishman, born in Sussex and therefore was one of those marked for deportation together with his family.

Rumours, unfounded or otherwise, had long circulated among the population about such possibilities, but a diet of rumour and speculation which added spice to an otherwise humdrum existence also served to dull the palate to their possible credence. As ever, I had been carefully shielded from these rumours.

The notice which I have quoted filled everyone with dismay, including even the German Command in Jersey and Guernsey, because the order had come without warning and no reason was given for it. All that the Feldkommandantur knew was that the order came directly from the Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler, and that it had to be enacted immediately.

Some very good books have been written about the deportation of those with English origins from the Channel Islands. To us, as Islanders, and being born in the town of St Helier I consider myself to be an Islander, it is a vast subject. The experiences of each family involved would fill many volumes. I was a part of just one of those families, the Still family, but from September 1942 until January 1943 I was 'off stage' as it were, the drama 'on stage' only to be glimpsed now and then by a chance remark of my father or an expression on Ruby's face in an unguarded moment.

The fact that my father was an ex-army officer and a Mason and that Ruby was of Jewish extraction made their deportation almost inevitable, if not now then later. This time my father had been granted exemption on various grounds, but for how long?

Fortunately, at sixty years of age, my father retained his vigour. It was he who grew the vegetables, who kept the rabbits and who set off on his bicycle in search of something for the larder. He also worked full time. I think that in a funny way he rather enjoyed the challenge of being a provider in the true sense. Ruby played her

## OVERDALE 'B' WARD

part. She had winsome ways and was adept at getting what she wanted. When my father would strike a deal with someone for food, Ruby would cajole the vendor into parting with a little extra. My father and Ruby were devoted to each other and, in times of future privation, they were to make a formidable team.

\*

Visiting days came and went. Margot and I devised a plan so that, on alternate visiting days, we were each guaranteed fifteen minutes for a private conversation. At a given time our extra visitors were tactfully but firmly sent to visit either one of us.

When Ruby, my father or Michael came to see me, we spoke of ordinary things and everyday events, as if by agreement. I often thought of my father's words, 'We are not going' and clung to them like a talisman against unhappier days.

\*

In October, Margot had a haemorrhage and had to keep quiet. I sent her little notes via Emily. Margot was given to sudden bursts of laughter when something amused her. I sent her a note begging her not to laugh, but she thought that was funny too. I was afraid of the laughter that might turn into a cough which would not stop until she haemorrhaged again.

\*

Our Purchasing Commission turned up trumps, and after supper we had a choice of either the usual coffee or Dubonnet and, occasionally, Champagne! The coffee

## OVERDALE 'B' WARD

was, of course, ersatz, but we had become accustomed to it. One way of producing coffee was to bake parsnip rings very slowly until they became brown and dry, and then they could be ground. I cannot remember the taste of Overdale coffee so it must have been a passable imitation of the real thing. Coffee at the General Hospital was unbelievable, but on every visit I found a renewed nostalgia for its awfulness.

\*

One morning, I was told that I would be moving to the top cubicles. My few belongings were packed. My room would be empty, without any imprint of my occupancy of almost eighteen months. How strange, to leave nothing of oneself behind, after having lived a hundred lives and died a few deaths while my head rested on its thin pillow. The side ward, bare in its clinical cleanness, would be impervious to any such phenomena, however fleeting.

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## Top Cubicles

Lying on a stretcher, and unable to lift my head, made it difficult to record anything but a distorted first impression of my new surroundings. It was as if I were led, partially blindfold, to a single room in a strange house and then told, 'this is your home, which, while you are here, you will never leave'. So it has to be said, with some whimsicality, that my first impression of the top cubicles will for ever be that of a rather superior row of bathing huts.

Margot was in the cubicle next to mine. We were not to know the reason for the move, or why the previous occupants, those almost mythical beings, the men patients, were being transferred.

'Nobody tells me anything' is a querulous remark that has been handed down as a quotable quote. The novelist John Galsworthy has James Forsyte say it in 'The Man of Property'. It could well be an alternative title to this book.

This unit at Overdale was situated on the highest ground. The row of cubicles, about ten in number, each joined the other and faced outward onto an open fronted verandah. They had no windows, but a folding door with glass panels could be drawn across the front of each cubicle. The inference seemed to be that one lived outside

## TOP CUBICLES

and would only be driven into shelter in extremes of weather.

It was considered of greatest importance in the thirties and forties that patients with TB should spend as much time as possible in the open air. In the Channel Islands the prevailing winds are westerlies, coming straight off the sea, fresh and clean, brine-tasting on the lips. One wonders now whether this damp sea air did more harm than good to those with the pulmonary form of the disease. Before the War, patients who could afford it took themselves to the mountains. In France and Italy there were famous sanatoria whose reputations were partly based on the purity of the mountain air.

Before the end of the War, Margot was to leave Jersey and make a brave journey, across German occupied France, first by barge to St Malo and then with difficulties and delays on to Paris. From Paris she travelled to a sanatorium in the Haute Savoie. From there, Margot wrote to me, and I quote 'The Médecin Chef sat on my bed and discussed my treatment with me'. Every word was heavily underlined. Attitudes were changing at last.

\*

It was Autumn when Margot and I arrived at the top cubicles, and a week of blustery weather with frequent showers kept us inside. Although Margot had the cubicle next to mine, we were more isolated than before, and we had lost our messenger. Emily had not been moved with us; if she had been her cheerful figure in pink pyjamas would soon have blown away on the wind. I believe that Margot and I were the only patients to be moved from 'B' Ward.

## TOP CUBICLES

It was extremely quiet without the comparative liveliness of the ward outside my door, and as my cubicle was towards the end of the row, few passed by. I would find myself listening for footsteps along the verandah and making little bets on whether or not they would stop before reaching my cubicle; the odds being long, the game soon palled. It was a measure of the quietness that even the sound of footsteps could be significant. I had no contact with the other patients and no one to tell me their names or to bring me news of them, except for Connie Samson, an up-patient, who was able to visit me occasionally; but in no way was she a second Emily, her style being of a quieter and less dramatic kind. The settling in and adjusting was more difficult than I could ever have imagined.

Everything changed on the second week. The sun shone again and all the beds were dragged on to the verandah. A change of mood convinced me that this would be a lovely autumn, and indeed it proved to be the case.

The view below was of the flat roofs and white walls of the hospital units and the gravelled paths, bordered by lawns and small trees, which gave access to them. Lower still could be seen the wide curve of St Aubin's Bay and the sea, looking placid from this distance even when it was not so. Right in the foreground, our foreground, stood a very large and beautiful lime tree, now dropping its leaves. In the extension of these sunny days the general view remained the same, but the tree put on a different show for us every day. Never before can it have been so admired.

For the first time, Margot and I could relax into our friendship and talk together or be silent as we wished. I had not seen her since we were first introduced the previous June. I thought she looked thinner and taller, the

latter a false impression, as many people whom I met when lying in the plaster I thought to be extremely tall, when in fact they were not. Margot's complexion was glowing, her hair a lustrous cloud, as I had remembered it. Her looks were deceiving. I was aware that she was not very well.

Margot and I were given a box gramophone and a few records. When Margot was well enough (for she had to wind up the machine) and all beds were on the verandah, we would give a little concert. There were always one or two objectors. Perhaps they were heartily tired of hearing Richard Tauber sing 'Girls were made to love and kiss' and Gertrude Lawrence singing 'The Physician'. The verandah – the sunshine – the gramophone, and if I might have added the deckchairs and the cucumber sandwiches – it begins to sound like an idyll of the thirties. On reflection, in many ways we were still in the thirties and it would be 1945 before there was an influx of new ideas into the Island.

The Indian Summer of 1942 is fixed firmly in my memory. I have turned up no weather reports for the period because, even if they had proved otherwise, and that the weather for October had been nothing out of the ordinary, I should still have held to the illusion. In every respect did Margot and I sojourn at an oasis in a desert of the banal, and the sunshine was not the least of it.

\*

Mr Halliwell had been to visit me. He examined the plaster and said it was now useless. I needed a new one and, while at the General Hospital, would have an X-ray. It was well over three months since I had last seen Mr Halliwell, and then to be told that I was virtually wasting my time lying in an ineffective plaster cast was just too

much. I said as much and told him that I considered that I had been very badly treated – to the extent that my recovery might be delayed, and if that was not important to anyone else, it was certainly important to me. Sister, who was accompanying Mr Halliwell, didn't intervene. I was too angry to take in Mr Halliwell's replies. Whatever he said would have been inadequate. So much time, I thought. So much wasted time. As doctors and particularly surgeons were then treated with the greatest respect, I thought there might be some repercussions from my outburst. But no. I had surprised myself with my vehemence. I may have surprised them all.

Two days later I went down to the General Hospital for a new plaster and X-ray. I was back in the little Orthopaedic Ward, now become so familiar.

I was to have a spica plaster. 'Spica' simply means the method of bandaging. The dictionary describes it as a spiral bandage with reverse turns suggesting an ear of barley. In the theatre, the same makeshift plaster bandages were used. The plaster, instead of being just a shell, this time encased my body. As before, it extended from above my waist to just above my knees. My feet were so positioned that one would be at each corner of the bed. A metal bar incorporated into the plaster between my thighs, just above my knees, kept the whole thing rigid.

Back in the little ward, there was difficulty in getting the plaster to dry out. After four days, desperate measures were used. First, I was turned over (a feat in such a cramped space, as my shape resembled in part that of a gymnast performing a cartwheel and arrested in mid-exercise), and then stone hot water bottles were laid along my back.

For anyone interested in antiques, stone hot water bottles are still to be found. In the Occupation they were

brought out from attics and storerooms when all rubber hot water bottles had perished. They were heavy, more so when filled. They fulfilled a purpose, though not generally that of weighing a patient down.

It happened to be visiting day and, as it was permitted for food to be brought into the General Hospital, Ruby had brought me one of her special dishes of cooked rabbit. First she was amazed at what was happening to me, and then was disappointed when I said she would have to take the rabbit back.

‘But you said you would like it.’

‘Yes, but not lying face down with two stone hot water bottles on my back.’

Towards evening, the drying treatment completed, in a manner of speaking, I was turned once again on my back.

I settled for the Hospital supper that evening.

‘Tonight’, said my friend in the next bed, ‘It will be either fried potatoes with brown gravy or bread pudding with chocolate sauce. Think about it before you taste anything’, she said ‘because they look exactly the same.’

When supper arrived, the dim light in the ward certainly added to the confusion, but by then I was too hungry to be wary and enjoyed whichever it was.

\*

During the night, two white coated figures, their torches dimmed, moved stealthily into the little ward. They began scrutinising heads on pillows and then peered into corners and under beds before creeping out again and we were in the dark once more. In the morning we learned that the Hospital Doctor and one of his staff had been looking for a missing male patient. He was a long stay patient who from time to time got tired of the bed he

was in, and would go on walk-about until he found another more to his liking in a different part of the hospital. On this occasion he was found tucked up in bed in the childrens' ward. Luckily for everybody, he was considered harmless; an eccentric, as was Emily at Overdale, and perhaps accepted by the staff of the General Hospital with as much tolerance. It certainly seemed like it, because there were several ribald jokes about whose bed he might have been tempted to try.

I was beginning to get nostalgic about the little ward. After each visit I would remember with fondness the kind of shortages we didn't experience at Overdale; the cup of ersatz tea served in a scratched tumbler, the zinc spoons and forks, none in their original shape; the battered and chipped enamelware. But most of all I took back to Overdale the sense of purpose generated in the General Hospital; of patients arriving and then later getting up and going home. I would not have chosen to stay permanently in the little ward, but a short visit always helped to get things in perspective.

The next day, I went back to Overdale. Two large ambulancemen came in to the little ward and, one on either side of the bed, prepared to lift me on to a stretcher. They looked so kindly at me as at 'a nice little girl', but their expressions changed to those of amazement when they found it was all they could do to lift me in my weight of plaster.

\*

Mid-November 1942 was typically cloudy with bursts of rain. Our beds were not dragged out onto the verandah so often and a kind of autumnal sadness began to creep in. We were, of necessity, very quiet, Margot and I. Though neighbours, we had no contact except when on

the verandah and more and more we missed Emily, her to-ing and fro-ing and the touches of high comedy she brought to the humdrum. The pencil and paper games that we had enjoyed previously had lost their edge, Margot was not always up to it; instead we wrote to each other only when we had something to say.

My new plaster was uncomfortable. Sister found nothing wrong with it and quoted one or two patients who had taken time to get used to their plasters. I began to have sleepless nights. My lower back felt inflamed and I was glad when the night nurse was able to come and talk to me. Something near panic was slowly growing in me, not because of the discomfort because that was still tolerable, but because my complaint that my lower back felt inflamed was not taken seriously. I wondered if they thought I was becoming neurotic after so long a stay in hospital. Perhaps I was, and the discomfort which had now settled to a quiet throbbing, was all in my imagination. For one more day the feeling of panic grew. The following morning there was consternation when my bed was stripped. Below the edges of the plaster, my legs looked almost twice their normal size. Sister was called and, using a pair of shears, she cut the plaster away. She tut-tutted when she saw that my back was excoriated.

For a couple of days I was petted and made much of. The new plaster was a failure. While from the outside it had appeared to be perfectly satisfactory, the inner layer of bandaging had been too tight or may have shrunk in the drying.

Mr Halliwell came to see me. We got on very well and we spoke about serious matters. My X-rays, he said, were worse than useless due to the poor quality of the German film. It was arranged that I would go to the

General Hospital for a new plaster and then would have more X-rays next January.

A week later I was back in the little ward. I was taken to theatre and could not believe my eyes. There, lying on a table, in all its glory, was a box of new Celona bandages, each one in a cellophane wrapper. These were the plaster bandages I had first been told about, light and quick drying. I think Mr Halliwell reckoned that I qualified for a present from his hidden store. It could not have been otherwise.

This plaster produced no problems. I could even turn on my side, which I did on one or two occasions, one leg stuck up in the air as an indication of victory.

\*

For some time I had had the feeling that this was the beginning of a time of last things. It was not due to introspection and the dolour of the season. All the signs were that something was about to happen. My recent personal problems had, for a little while, masked my fears for the family. The threat of deportation had not been lifted from the Still family. Deportations continued and, although nothing was said, I felt that it would be just a matter of time before my father's previous exemption was reviewed.

And what of Margot's chances? Or of mine? Margot was not well. I had made no apparent progress after nearly eighteen months of lying in the plaster, well over the 'cure in twelve months' in which I had so firmly believed.

These issues were not on the agenda for visiting afternoons.

Ah! Visitors! and 'Visiting Day'! More the title for a one-act play for general viewing than a meeting of true

minds. We all played our parts, visitors and patients alike, my role as ingenue easily contrived with such few props as a pristine counterpane and a bowl of white daisies on top of the locker. No make-up was necessary. My appearance fitted the bill, as did Ruby's as the elegant older woman, divested of all fret and anxiety as she left the porter's lodge, and now wearing a mantle of gentle insouciance.

The scene is set. Enter visitors carrying flowers.

Exclamations and smiles. A nurse hovering nearby to see that not more than two visitors are at each particular bedside, wringing her hands when she thinks she should exert her authority. Ruby has brought a friend with her. 'I promised Claire I would bring her to see you.' Bursts of laughter from another cubicle; someone is being witty at the Germans' expense. Small talk. Local gossip. Are you short of writing paper, fruit, books? These pears are from the garden.

The first bell rings, indicating the end of visiting time.

Good-bye, you are looking so well darling and, oh, I forgot to tell you, Jane sends her love.

The second bell rings. All depart, lingeringly. Curtain.

Could it have been otherwise. Yes and again, no. Much as we might have wished, it seemed impossible that Ruby and I could see into each other's hearts in those last dreary days of 1942.

'But didn't you go through it all again after the war?' you may ask. No. At first the associations were too painful and later they gradually faded and were put aside, only to be reviewed from one person's recollections, my own, over fifty years later.

\*

We had a spell of fine weather and were outside again. The lime tree was bare now, but looked just as majestic.

Starlings flew in every afternoon and clustered on its branches. They did not stay to roost but would leave quite suddenly as at a given signal. There were some splendid sunsets over the bay. November that year was a fine month for sunsets.

I am sure that those meditative days of late Autumn were a source of spiritual strength; not in any religious sense, but I had learned to profit from solitude, and the processes of thought helped to shape certain hopes and resolves.

If I try to superimpose today's scenario on that particular time, how would it have been? Of the deportations there would have been full media coverage of events and headlines in the national dailies, with poignant pictures of people in distress. There would have been constant 'phone calls and, with today's relaxed hospital visiting, a stream of friends intent on giving me their opinions and advice.

The cacophony is deafening. What would be the chances of attaining steadfastness then?

Living standards rise and fall with the times. During the German Occupation of Jersey the markers were removed as required, invariably downward. But as they were moved, there came a time when austerity, as distinct from poverty, gave a fine edge to thought and an appreciation of quality. Deprivation simply showed the way.

The haves of today are also deprived, but many are unaware of it. Silence makes people uneasy, and the fine edge of quality is blunted by consumerism. Somewhere between these two extremes lies the mythical pink pearl of wisdom and happiness forever just out of reach of the dragon's mouth.

\*

I was, and still am, a born scavenger. During the Occupation, the word was to take on a more elevated meaning than that defined in the dictionary, ie cleaning the streets of waste. Seaside dwellers have always been beachcombers, and no doubt this was good training for the practised eye needed to see in what, before the War, would have been consigned to the dustbin. Waste never littered the streets of St Helier, it was too valuable to leave lying about. Waste, you could say, was non-existent. This denoted ingenuity rather than poverty. It also involved barter and sometimes a gift.

An instance of scavenging of a high order had recently taken place in the small world of the top cubicles. One of the patients had an idea. Sister was approached (through the usual channels) and was persuaded to part with the right amount of plain white lint. Used double, nap on the outside, cut, stitched and embroidered, the result was a charming matinee jacket for a baby's christening, and looked anything but makeshift. The little garment would not have withstood much wear, but it was soft and pretty and pleased Mrs Mauger's daughter for whom it was intended.

The challenge was the thing. Someone had an idea or remembered past skills in order to supply a need, and then it was taken up. The making of 'crystal sets' was a case in point. When radios, or wireless sets as they were then called, were forbidden, those sets relying on batteries could be hidden from the authorities for a while until the batteries eventually failed. This was the advent of the crystal set. A crystal set could be made to operate in a matchbox but needed a loudspeaker to make the signal audible. Earpieces were scavenged, or in some cases stolen from public callboxes. An earpiece laid on a flat surface could enable three or four people in a tight circle to hear the BBC news.

## TOP CUBICLES

Secrecy was habitual to us all. I knew about crystal sets and that people were listening to the news, but who listened to it, and where and when, was never mentioned. I expect my father listened to the news but he would not have told anyone. Secrecy was essential so as not to incriminate another person, with the added safeguard that what the person didn't know could not be divulged by a slip of the tongue. Not all informers were German.

Canon Cohu, the Hospital Chaplain, as well as coming to give Communion, relayed the BBC news in every ward. On the top cubicles he strode up and down the verandah as he spoke, or took up a stance against one of its supporting pillars. His voice was that of an orator and carried well in the open air. Through either courage or carelessness he constantly put himself at risk. Ultimately he was betrayed, sentenced and imprisoned in Germany. Finally, in February 1945, he was taken to Spergau Concentration Camp, where he died.

Such challenges which were met and the outcome exploited could only take place in time of war and in siege conditions. There is nothing to be said for ingenuity for ingenuity's sake.

It is possible for anyone to have a sense of such a time and such a place from reading about it, but it will fall far short of the actual experience. One had to be there. Anyone who has been held hostage, under a benign influence or a diabolical one, only he or she will have absorbed the intangible spirit of that time.

\*

December 12th, 1942 was my twentieth birthday. I hardly noticed its passing.

\*

## TOP CUBICLES

It became cold at night. Nurse Le Cocq, the night nurse, brought stone hot water bottles at 3 a.m., one to be placed near each foot. She often stayed a while. At first I encouraged her to stay out of fear that the hot water bottles might become too hot where they were placed. I could not have moved my feet away. I came to look forward to Nurse Le Cocq's visits. She was the night watchman saying that all was well.

\*

Margot was given a remarkable present. It was a small drum of white pepper and a distinct rarity. We discussed its use quite seriously and decided we would have pepper with our lunches on Tuesdays and Fridays. Although there was a flourishing black market where, it was said, anything could be bought at a price, this was not strictly true. Small and important items such as pepper could only have come from someone's stock, pre-Occupation.

\*

It would soon be Christmas. The weather was cold and damp with what seemed like a perpetual sea mist coming off the bay. It was a state of weather which Jersey people call 'raw'. By German Decree, we observed Summer Time. On bright days the sun would be shining still at 5 p.m., but when the weather closed in and shortened the afternoon, there were long hours until daylight came the following morning at about 9 a.m. I do not mean that we were without light all that time – lights out was at eight o'clock as usual, but the cubicles themselves were gloomy. They went well with gloomy thoughts.

I was made a present of a board, rather like an easel, that rested on my bed. It was to enable me to play

patience. The board had pockets in which to place the cards. A museum piece compared to what is on offer today. I used it a little, but it was not really what was needed. I was solitary enough without playing solitaire.

We were of course confined indoors in such weather. Margot and I wrote to each other daily. We needed to do our Christmas shopping and time was getting short. Our method was to trawl for information from everyone with whom we came into contact. We would angle the conversation towards a usually imagined art or craft, and exclaim at the skill this or that person had shown in making an object of either use or beauty. We knew there were such people and hoped that our challenging remarks would bring a response. When we had almost given up, we struck gold. Someone knew someone who cured rabbit skins and made gloves from them. Fur backed, coloured skin palms. He would take orders. What colour fur would we like? We were made.

I chose black fur and red palms for Paul.

It was Christmas 1942. Many letters, cards and flowers arrived. They were the language of communication. Flowers for special occasions and letters for every day. Instead of reaching for the telephone, because we had no telephone, we reached for the notepad. If I wanted an item from home, for instance, I had to write a letter.

Margot and I had dispatched our letters and cards. Had we wished to be whimsical, we might have sent cards to each other, as from distant friends.

Christmas letters were special. In my mail was a proposal of marriage.

I felt honoured as well as excited, but after a lot of thought I knew what my reply would be. Margot was in my confidence and promised to entertain all my visitors so that Paul and I would have a little time alone. We

talked and I said I would like to delay making any promises or commitments until I was well. How dull and unresponsive that sounds. It is like saying, in common parlance, that after a mini-conference, a special relationship was reached. But of course it was more than that. It was disappointment of a kind for Paul, and I, instead of being happy, felt strangely cast down. In one respect it was the 'lying flat' syndrome again. Though far from being inarticulate, I could not express myself freely, my words more a cover for my feelings than an expression of them.

The days of Christmas came and went. Apart from our visitors it was a dismal time, and I remember little of it except for watching Cook make her way through a rainstorm towards the main gate. We gave her a loud cheer for producing a Christmas dinner against all the odds, and she acknowledged it with a wave.

\*

Just after Christmas I was told that this would be my last week at Overdale. The Department of Public Health had taken over a property known as 'Les Vaux' as an annexe and those patients not receiving treatment would be moved there. I was one of those. There was a rising epidemic of diphtheria in the Island and all available beds were likely to be needed at Overdale.

Nurse Le Cocq suggested that we had a farewell party for me in my cubicle. It was to be a secret, as any unorthodox goings-on were frowned upon. We decided on ten o'clock in the evening. Margot and Connie were the guests. The 'spread' consisted of a bottle of Algerian wine and a tin of dessert cherries. Nurse Le Cocq presided. It was a parody of the dormitory feast to the extent even that Sister might make an unscheduled visit.

## TOP CUBICLES

The cherries had turned pale with long storage and the wine was almost undrinkable and no one was fit, but I felt it was a good send off and maybe a turning point.

The next day my belongings were once again gathered together. The ambulancemen arrived with a stretcher. I clutched my personal bag tighter and looked straight ahead as I passed Margot's cubicle. Her door was closed. As on so many mornings, the only sound on the top cubicles was the sound of footsteps. At the end of the verandah there were a few steps to be negotiated and I caught a glimpse of the sea. It appeared to lack colour and movement, reflecting the quiet overcast sky, typical for December. A fine rain touched my face before I was placed in the ambulance; then we were inside, the nurse accompanying me making sure I was well tucked in to my blanket, while the engine rumbled into life. The ambulance moved off slowly until we were past the main gates, and then began to pick up speed.



St. Catherine's Bay.  
From Belval Cove.



St. Catherine's Breakwater with  
railings and lamp-standards, 1993.



My father.



Ruby and I in 1939.



Kenton. Almost unchanged in 1993.



Ruby.



Michael.



Fay.



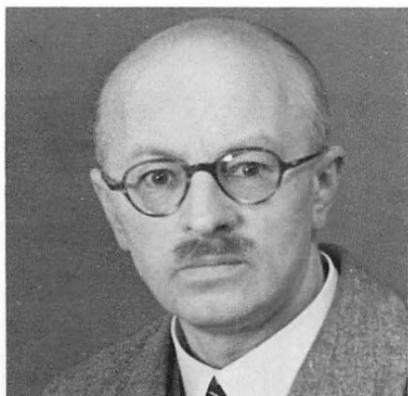
Margot.  
In France after the war.



Overdale. Covered walkways to B Ward.  
The view unchanged in 1993.



Overdale. Top Cubicles. A recent view with  
the addition of windows and a line of chimneys.



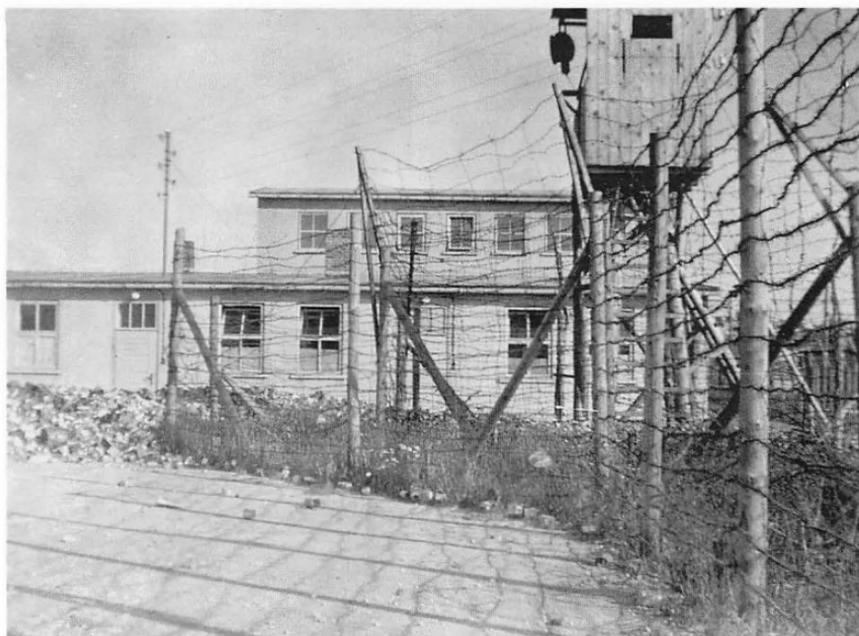
Mr. Woodman.



Mrs. Woodman (Muss).



Part of the front entrance to Frémont.



Biberach Camp. Perimeter fence and a watch tower.  
In the background Red Cross Stores showing  
empty Red Cross tins. *Author's collection.*



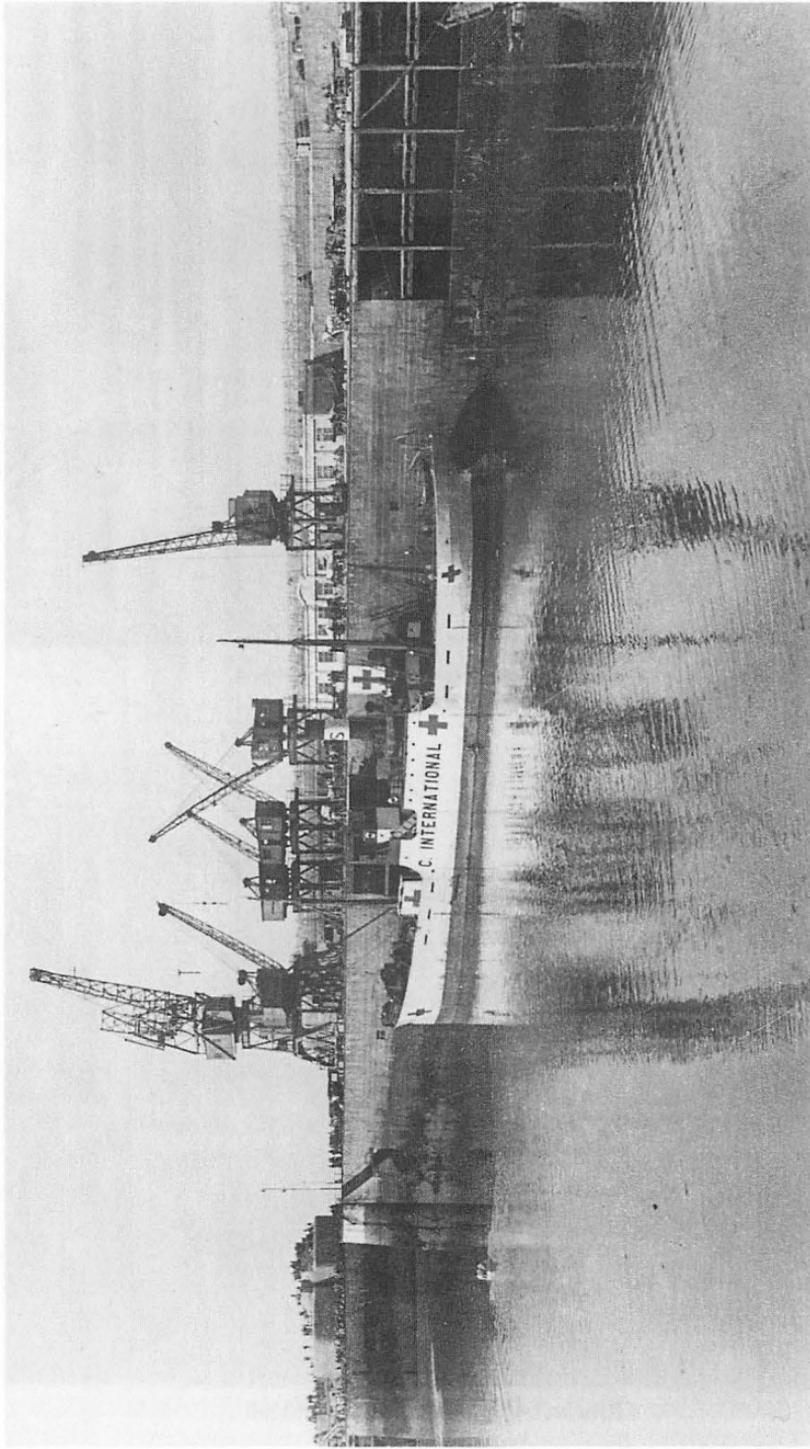
Biberach Camp. A view of Barracks  
11-12-13-15. *Author's collection.*



Biberach Camp. Hospitals – opposite schoolrooms. *Author's collection.*



Biberach Camp. Entertainment Hall. *Author's collection.*



The Swedish ship Vega. Reproduced by courtesy of the Société Jersstaise.

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## Les Vaux

**L**es Vaux, the property taken over by the Department of Public Health as an annexe to Overdale Isolation Hospital, consisted of a large house standing in its own extensive grounds, extensive that is in proportion to the size of the Island. Its name was the same as that of the valley in which was situated, denoting its importance. Valleys in Jersey run from north to south, their sides rise gently to a modest height and are well wooded. A single road follows the valley floor, and it is often true to say that 'the other side of the valley is just across the road'.

'Les Vaux', which would then have been described as a gentleman's residence, stood well back from the road which ran through Grand Vaux Valley and was about a mile and a half from St Helier. From its entrance by way of wrought iron gates between stone pillars, its prospect followed a rising curve, flattening to accommodate the house before falling rather more sharply to rejoin the road farther up the valley. Behind the house, rising ground continued in its wooded state. The full extent of the property was protected on the road side by a high granite wall. I think the word 'protective' well describes the use of granite walls in Jersey, sea breezes being constant from a cat's paw to a moderate to a severe gale; add too the beauty of the stone and the warmth of the

sun which it retains for long hours, and many a gardener possessing such a walled garden would consider himself blessed.

As to the house itself, it was approached by a drive, shady, and in winter rather dark I suspected, from the tree-high rhododendrons on either side. The dampness of the valley and its partial shade would have accounted for such growth. The drive ended in a small forecourt and the impression was that this was the side of the house, with the front door placed there simply for convenience. The true front of the house needed to be viewed from a distance – a row of tall windows with french doors behind a graceful portico extending the length of the building, and then a lawn drawing the eye down towards a lawn tennis court at a lower level. The turf of the tennis court was over one hundred years old, so we were told. Trees and more rhododendrons curtained the whole of this area and gave to the house an air of quiet seclusion.

At the rear of the house the ground fell away quite sharply and had been used to advantage. A stone balcony, circular in design, gave an open view up the valley. From the balcony a flight of steps led down towards a pergola so extended as to make it a raised garden. The pergola ended and a further downward flight of steps led to stables and a stable yard across which wooden doors opened again onto the valley road.

But all of Les Vaux that presented itself to me on my arrival was the distance between the ambulance and the front door, the fine rain falling and the bitter tang of dead and decaying leaves on a winter's afternoon.

\*

My bed was in a corner of what would have been the drawing room of the house, the windows closed to the

portico and the lawn beyond. There were five beds, one in each corner and one with its back against the French windows. This was to be my home for the next five months.

My companions were agreeable strangers, all but one being orthopaedic cases. In a sense they were as remote from me as the patients in 'B' Ward had been, excepting for Mrs Le Maistre, a French lady who occupied the bed nearest to mine. She had an excellent command of the English language and made me laugh one day when, deep in a novel set in the English provinces she looked up and asked me 'Why is there always someone in these novels who has an aunt living in Surbiton?' With Mrs Le Maistre's encouragement I aimed to improve my French, but lacked the essential concentration.

I had never felt more despondent. It was due partly to the fact that I had become unaccustomed to being in the company of others every hour of the day and night. In the 'drawing room ward' I found this kind of sharing something of an ordeal. I tried not to show it. Of the two, isolation is to be preferred, since isolation is broken by virtue of visitors, while visitors tend to compound the constant presence of people. People held together in an enclosed space create, in a very short time, tensions in the very air they displace; soundless voices beat against the air; an essential silence is challenged, a metaphysical space in which to move freely.

But I was cheerful in remembering the little ward at the General Hospital with its cramped conditions – nostalgic even, was I not? Ah! I was a different person in June 1941, and at the very beginning of an adventure, if it could be so called. I had lost some exuberance of spirit since then and found recognition of that 'inward eye' as described by the poet Wordsworth. It had become an escape and a consolation.

Whilst Les Vaux was officially described as an auxiliary hospital, it was in reality more like a nursing home. It could not have been otherwise, catering as it did only for patients not receiving regular treatment apart from bed rest. It was run by Matron Norwood and her small nursing staff and in the beginning we five, as well as four men whose ward opened onto the stone balcony, were the only patients. With no changes of either staff or patients, we were a tight and closed community. We co-existed through politeness. In our room there was a sense that any controversial remark made by one of us would be weighed and judged by the other four, judged and probably found wanting in maintaining peace and quietness. I thought of Arctic explorers marooned for days in their hut while a blizzard raged. They too had the great need of politeness and of forbearance.

Matron Norwood ran the hospital, in the difficult conditions of Occupation, with care and efficiency. She was slight in stature, good-looking, with a narrow face, a warm complexion and brown eyes, her straight dark hair with its classic centre parting drawn back beneath her headdress. Matron's judgements on certain requests made by the patients were sometimes arbitrary, one was never quite sure what the rules were, but that was her privilege. It was our privilege to have a matron who was not a remote and aloof figure, as a large hospital might have demanded.

As promised by Mr Halliwell the previous November, I was taken to the General Hospital for X-ray. The results were favourable. I was to have further X-rays in February.

The results were favourable. I turned the word 'favourable' round and round like a piece of a jig-saw puzzle, to see how well it would fit the various pictures that the word evoked. Well wishers insisted that the word

'favourable' meant that I was practically cured, but I held back from that, being doubtful of the 'usefulness' of German X-ray film.

It occurs to me to wonder whether any of the X-rays taken at that time were of value. Had I, because enough time had elapsed for an improvement to be expected, been treated, like a present, to a pre-War X-ray film? Were we, as patients, given X-rays from time to time which were virtually useless in order to give us the psychological boost that our disease was being closely monitored? It is a whimsical thought, but might bear a grain of truth. It is a little mystery that does not cloud the excellent treatment we received within the Island's capabilities.

\*

My visitors came on their bicycles in the mild rainy weather of that January. They were now spared the climb up Westmount. I could now see them in my mind as they dismounted at the gate before walking up the drive, pushing their bicycles through a dim tunnel of shining green leaves, the rain dripping ceaselessly from them onto the already saturated earth. Paul came to see me, Mr and Mrs Woodman came to see me and other good friends came to see me, but it was only the visits of my father and Ruby which stayed in the forefront of my mind when the visiting hours were over. They stood against a multi-hued backcloth of moving figures in their different intents. They stood against a grey sky. My father and Ruby were again on a deportation list.

The German Headquarters for Civilian Affairs was housed in College House, adjacent to Victoria College and, before the war, used to accommodate boarders. This was where interviews took place to determine who would

be deported and who would be exempted. My father was interviewed several times.

The substance of these interviews was never even hinted to me. It was the well known conspiracy of silence. On visiting days we continued to talk of everyday things, as we had done for months. We discussed my improvement and the chances of a celebration in the summer. Michael was not tuned in to this charade. With schoolboy frankness he said 'If Mum is sent to Germany I will go with her, because I will be sure of getting something to eat.'

It was not my father's way to indulge in emotion, particularly in public. The army way of life and of facing adversity with equanimity would always be very much a part of him. It was a little hard on the army's daughters though. Had I wept I would not have been comforted, but 'Bear up, Peg' would have been the order of the day. On the other side of the coin, I would have followed my father even into battle.

In February, there were more interviews at College House. My father had been exempted from the first and second deportations of last September, but while he was being re-considered this time, it was Ruby who was the focus of attention. Ruby, of Jewish extraction, was classed as 'undesirable'. The Germans held a list of 'undesirables', those whom they kept their eye on. That this petite lady in her mid-fifties could ever have been a threat to the Third Reich was as laughable as her proposed deportation was tragic. It was still to be hoped that my state of health would be reason enough for the family to remain here.

Apparently not. At the last interview at College House which my father, Ruby and Michael attended, it was put to my father that he should remain here to look after my interests, but that Ruby would have to go. At this my

father became angry. 'Do you really think I would allow my wife to go without me?', to which the reply was 'In that case you will all go, and we will decide whether your daughter is fit enough to travel; and you are making a mistake, Mr Still, because when you arrive in Germany you and your wife will be separated.'

I was ordered to attend at the German Military Doctor's Office for examination, to determine whether or not I would be deported along with the rest of the family.

\*

The day of the interview arrived. I was awake early. I borrowed someone's best nightdress, combed my hair and waited. Gessed—at situations made vivid pictures in my mind, the predominant one that of being interviewed while lying on a stretcher. Would I have to face a tribunal? The stretcher was no embarrassment, but should I have to give an account of myself whilst lying down I would be greatly disadvantaged. I was not alarmed. The examination itself could only be a formality; after all, it was obvious that I was unable to travel anywhere, anyone could see that. I was very innocent of the Nazi regime. Had they wanted to deport me I now have no doubt that I would have left on a stretcher.

Ruby had come to see me the previous evening. 'Just remember, darling,' she said 'they are not all Nazis.' I pondered this remark and wondered if she had already found the military doctor sympathetic.

In the middle of the morning, an army ambulance arrived for me. It looked like a rectangular box on wheels, painted grey and with a red cross on each side. Double doors opened at the back and I was lifted up the few steep steps and settled inside. A nurse from Les Vaux

accompanied me. We set off at a slow and rumbling pace. The nurse remained silent; she suffered from motion sickness, and I had my own thoughts. After perhaps fifteen minutes the ambulance slowed and turned into what was presumably a courtyard, as the tyres crunched on gravel. We stopped. The nurse got out and I waited, my eyes on the open ambulance doors.

Footsteps on the gravel announced a German Officer. He mounted the steps of the ambulance and as he bent to enter, my first sight of him was of grey hair, then a thick neck encircled by the upright stiff collar embroidered with silver thread that adorned the grey-blue uniform jacket. I wondered briefly if he would greet me and in what manner I should respond. He was unlikely to raise his right arm and say 'Heil Hitler'; there was a touch of humour in the thought; and of my response which would have been to admire the view through the window of the ambulance which afforded no view, being blacked out.

In the event, he did not say anything, in fact neither of us spoke. He stooped and folded back the blanket which covered me so that a few inches of plaster were exposed, tapped the edge of the plaster cast a couple of times with his fingernail, returned the blanket, patted me on the cheek, and left. The nurse returned to the ambulance, and we were taken back to Les Vaux.

The examination had indeed been only a formality and the doctor had been sympathetic. I felt reassured.

I received a warm welcome from my room when I returned to Les Vaux; out of all proportion to the occasion, I thought. It was as if they had expected never to see me again. It is strange that, after so many years, I should have only learned recently that everyone in the 'drawing room ward' had indeed not expected to see me again, it being understood that the ambulance had arrived to take me to the harbour for embarkation. Dr

McKinstry was visiting at the time and I do not know what was his interpretation of events, but he remarked to Matron that it was 'nice to see our little blue eyed Aryan again', a comment that could be construed in several ways. The day then settled to its usual pace, Matron still suffering from the slight she felt at having been told to release one of her patients, for whatever purpose. Matrons were very autocratic in those days.

My father had another interview, this time with Dr Bleckwenn the Military Doctor who had 'examined' me. He told my father that he was sorry but that he could do nothing for him. A certificate to prove that I was unfit to travel made no difference to Ruby's deportation order. Then Dr Bleckwenn asked my father,

'Please show me your identity card.'

My father produced it. (The details it contained were similar to a passport, including photograph.) The doctor continued,

'I see that you are sixty years of age.'

Then, looking my father straight in the eye, the doctor said 'Take your identity card to someone, do not do it yourself, and have the nought of the sixty made into a five.' and he added

'I happen to know that men of sixty-five and over will not be separated from their wives.'

\*

The date set for the Still family to be deported was February 12th, 1943.

All deportation orders served on the heads of families were as follows:

FELDKOMMAND 515 JERSEY

In pursuance of a higher command British Subjects are to be evacuated and brought to Germany.

You have to appear therefore on ..... at ..... with wife and minor children.

You have to take with you all papers proving your identity.

It is necessary to outfit yourself with warm clothes, strong boots and provisions for two days, meal dishes, drinking bowl and if possible with a blanket.

Your luggage must not be heavier than you can carry and must bear a label with your full address.

It is further left to you to place ready, for each person, a trunk packed with clothes to be sent afterwards, labelled with full address.

It is also left for you to take with you an amount of money not exceeding Reichmarks 50 in German notes for each person in Reichcredit Notes.

All valuables (jewels) must be deposited as far as possible with the banks.

Keys of the houses are to be handed over to the Constables.

Should you fail to obey the order sentence by Court Martial shall be effected.

Der Feldkommandant  
KNACKFUSS, Oberst.

The value of 50 Reichmarks in Sterling in February 1943 was approximately £5. 6s. 8d.

Ruby, my father and Michael came to say good-bye. Ruby said 'I would feel so much better if you were with me' and I wished I had been fit and able to go with them.

They left for Germany by boat on February 13th at seven o'clock in the evening. All night long the hooting of sirens could be heard from the harbours. We often heard them but that night the sound was mournful and evoked in me a fearful loneliness.

I spent a night of sick imaginings. I saw my family in German occupied Europe. I saw them at night in a street in an unknown city being jostled in a surging mass of people. I saw the searchlights of surveillance and, caught in their beams, their pale and bewildered faces moving farther and farther out of sight.

\*

I was given into the care of Mr and Mrs Woodman. James Woodman was the Managing Director of the brewery where my father had worked. Their daughter, Fayette, was my age. We had met before but not in any intimate way. I was soon to find that I had a new wartime family.

\*

The turmoil of the last few weeks had ceased abruptly. There was nothing more to be done. Those already in internment camps had written to say that life was tolerable and that they had received Red Cross parcels. In due course I should receive a Red Cross letter.

\*

The days dragged by as they never had before. Our room was dark, the portico keeping out any brief intervals of sunshine. Rain and dull skies had prevailed all winter.

Margot's letters kept coming from Overdale. They were my companions. We corresponded almost daily and discussed every aspect of our lives, as we had before.

Mr Halliwell had recently been discharged from Overdale after having recovered from diphtheria. There was an epidemic of this disease and measures had to be taken in St Helier to contain it. I asked Margot for details of Mr Halliwell but all she knew was that he had been a terrible patient.

I went to the General Hospital for my X-rays, hoping for what?

\*

Two days after having my X-rays, Mr Halliwell came to visit.

'You are cured' he said, and he added 'You shouldn't have any further trouble for the rest of your life.'

I gazed back at him. I could not shout for joy, in fact I felt nothing. It was as if, having waited so long for such wonderful news, I could not adjust. I could not say the right words or put the right expression on my face, but inwardly I felt it all and almost wanted to delay realisation of the fact as in opening the wrapping very very slowly around a long awaited gift.

At Easter the plaster was removed. I had to remain in bed for a month. It was no hardship now that I had such freedom. Being confined to bed is not usually equated with freedom, but for three weeks it was all of that. To sit up for meals, to hang my head over the end of the mattress and have my hair washed, to lie on my side to

sleep and to ask for a dressing gown from home and feel its soft folds around me .....

The french windows in our room were open now and our beds were wheeled out under the portico. This was a graceful structure, its slim pillars entwined with the green leaves of climbing plants. This type of frontage, a portico extending the full width of the front of the building, was typical of many Jersey houses. The tiled floors of the portico are usually of terracotta warm with entrapped sunshine, and redolent of summer days, the deck chairs and sandshoes tidied away just for a while.

\*

I was having my first real view of Les Vaux. From the portico the lawn sloped down to the tennis court. None of us ever aspired to play but the nurses did occasionally. The sloping lawn had bushes of rhododendrons sweeping the grass on either side. Often a cat crouched under one of them for hours at a time, quite motionless; only now and then could I catch a gleam of his eye among the leaves. This part of the garden was very secluded and, in my state of euphoria, it was all part of an idyll.

This state of affairs was not reflected outside. Living was difficult and rations meagre. Many food items were now ersatz, only on rare occasion proving to be better than their originals.

We were never short of food in the hospitals, but its sameness palled. The never-ending semolina puddings of Overdale were superseded by the vermicelli puddings of Les Vaux. Before cooking this product the maggots had to be sifted out. Some always managed to get through and turned up in our puddings. Any strand of vermicelli with a black tip was not vermicelli. We set these aside and cheerfully ate the rest. Mrs Le Maistre was a

permanent resident under the portico, and had a close relationship with a robin who came regularly to the rim of her plate for these 'set asides'. Matron considered the robin's proximity to the food to be unhygienic. He was obliged to distance himself a little.

Everything was going too well. After three weeks in bed, I was allowed to stand briefly and sit in a chair while my bed was made, then back into bed. After several days of this, and while the nurse was otherwise engaged, I decided to try a little more. I made sure everyone was watching, said 'look at me', stood up and took two steps then clutched at one of the pillars of the portico and slid gently to the floor. I could not get over the surprise of it, in fact every following stage of learning to walk again was a surprise. These processes were never explained to me, or the dangers involved. It seems incredible to me now that I was, more or less, left to get on with it. Counselling was a word for the future.

The result of my fall was a painful foot. Mr Halliwell was called for. He came and diagnosed a badly sprained ankle. He was angry. Matron, in attendance, glowered. I winced with pain as my foot was being strapped up. Dr McKinstry, who was visiting, came over to us to see what was going on. Mr Halliwell fulminated about having to leave the theatre to attend ungrateful patients. Dr Mac smiled at me, made a stage wink, then turned to Mr Halliwell and in his mildest voice remarked 'Now, when you were a patient at Overdale just recently, I don't recall that there was very much discipline up there.'

There were smiles all round after that, my punishment that I was not allowed to put a foot on the ground for three weeks.

\*

In May I received a postcard from Ruby dated February 18th from the Camp des Prisonniers at Compiègne, north of Paris. I quote part of it; 'Dad and I arrived here 15th Feb. Michael not with us. All well.'

\*

For three weeks, somewhat subdued, I spent the days sitting in a garden chair, fully dressed and with my ankle propped up. I had seen myself in a mirror and I was fat. None of my clothes fitted. I fretted about my size. As for making a new beginning, I felt as disadvantaged as when I was in plaster. The euphoria was over and the 'blues' had set in.

When the three weeks were over, I was allowed to walk. This time I did not fall down, but I did not walk either. The aching in my feet was such that I could only circle the drawing room ward once, from hand-hold to hand-hold, before getting back into bed. This went on for several weeks until the aching, quite suddenly it seemed, left one foot and, a few days later, the other. Now it was all practice. A further week and I walked down the drive to the main gate. I was overweight and my legs were like pale thin sticks despite receiving electrical treatment at the General Hospital to strengthen my calf muscles. I thought I was marvellous. In all, it was three months before I could walk without making heavy weather of it.

\*

I now had the freedom of Les Vaux. For the first time I was able to wander away on my own when I felt inclined. I was not a free agent, no one is, but during the time I

was in plaster that particular restraint had been the hardest to bear.

The flat land within the wall and nearest the road was tended by a private gardener. It was part market garden and Mr Jordan, a man of near retirement age, grew fruit and vegetables which he sold locally. He had a little war with Matron, who thought he should have sold them to the hospital. Perhaps her price was not right. Mr Jordan was a true gardener, he loved his plants, and I began to spend part of each day assisting where I was allowed.

When it rained we would repair to the greenhouse. It was a showery summer but the showers were short ones, enhancing the pleasure of such a warm refuge while the rain rattled against the glass. Mr Jordan's specialty was African daisies and the greenhouse was full of their pastel shades.

The symmetry of the market garden was broken by an open space given to an old mulberry tree. The texture and taste of its fruit disappointed me, being soft and insipid. Nobody picked the fruit, the fallen berries in the grass making a purple shading in a ring around the tree. Its dense dark leaves made a perfect umbrella for a summer shower, but on a day when a sudden storm was upon us, the mulberry umbrella was not enough and Mr Jordan, with waving arms, signalled that I should join him in the greenhouse. Anyone would imagine that I would run for shelter, alarmed by the storm, but I could walk only very very slowly and must have appeared somewhat eccentric as I apparently idled my way past the lettuces, carrots and raspberry canes, more drenched than I had ever been in my life from a passing shower, unconcerned by the thunder and lightning, seriously intent on putting one foot carefully before the other.

I became a courier for the others in the ward, also a hairdresser, a flower arranger and a carrier of rabbits.

Matron decided that we should keep rabbits in order to add protein to our diet. A row of hutches was set up under the pergola some way from the house. The rabbits duly arrived. They were young ones, and I was admiring them when Matron said 'You can help', put a rabbit into each of my hands, and set off briskly across the garden and down a flight of steps towards the pergola.

Could Matron have designed this as a fitness test, a spur of the moment idea that could not be bettered? I still found walking a considerable effort. To negotiate a flight of steps with a rabbit in each hand would take all my concentration. I failed the steps test utterly and, to cat-calls from the men's balcony, I descended step by step on my bottom.

The rabbits had been installed for only a few weeks when they were stolen. The grounds were easy of access so anyone could have come in at night. There were German soldiers camped farther up the valley, and they were thought to prowl around the house and gardens.

The Germans were blamed and Matron acquired a dog she called Mr Jinks to accompany the night nurse on her rounds, against prowlers. It was too late to protect the rabbits. Mr Jinks was a disappointment. A black, friendly animal, part labrador, he slunk behind the night nurse, tail between his legs, and had to be dragged along behind her.

I have often mentioned rabbits. They were as important a stock item during the Occupation as in the days of the Lord of the Manor when he employed his warrener.

Curiously, I never once tasted rabbit during the whole of the War. They were as elusive to me as in those stories of my childhood when they appeared regularly, only to be changed into something else.

## LES VAUX

One day a young woman came looking for me. She had been in Biberach Internment Camp and was being repatriated as she had agreed to work for the Germans. Her name was Micky. She brought me flowers, a letter from Ruby and a parcel. The parcel contained a tin of Klim (powdered milk), another of Nescafé and some orangeade powder. These items came from Red Cross parcels sent to the camps and were completely new to us. We thought they were wartime innovations, like emergency rations or a superior kind of ersatz. After the novelty of the first tasting, we were not impressed.

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Despite my failing the rabbit and steps test, I was now considered mobile enough to move to Les Vaux's top cubicles.

Very near the top of the rise which defined the valley and overlooking the house was a small natural plateau. This had been levelled and on a base of granite chippings cubicles had been erected of a style similar to those of Overdale.

Access was across the forecourt and by way of steps and a path leading upwards through the trees and bushes which lined the slope. A rustic handrail was provided. Once arrived, one was completely out of sight of the house below and surrounded by the green leaves of summer and the endless cooing of woodpigeons. Those fit enough to make the climb were given a cubicle, so releasing beds in the house.

Being restless, I spent a large part of every day climbing up to the plateau and down again, with wonderful effect, as my excess weight dropped steadily away.

We patients were required to remain on the plateau after suppertime. It was July and the evenings were long and devoted to playing rummy in all its variations in one or other of the cubicles.

True to the doctrine of fresh air, the night nurse made her first round at nine o'clock to ensure that we had put up camp beds a little way away from the cubicles and under the trees. We were given a ground sheet each to protect ourselves from night dews. Insects worried us more than night dews and those susceptible were soon covered with weals and bumps.

We never questioned the wisdom of sleeping out, even though we were aware of prowlers near enough to make themselves heard. I reckoned that the Germans knew that this was an isolation hospital. Matron once told us that the word 'isolation' in this context had a very different meaning in Germany, ie a hospital for treating venereal diseases. That being so, we were as safe as houses.

Or nearly so. In the late evening or early morning, the Germans on the adjoining property took to shooting at the wood pigeons in our trees. Feathers would drift about us and on several occasions, dead or stunned birds would land on our beds.

Still we stuck it out until one night there was an aerial skirmish and pieces of shrapnel from anti-aircraft fire started crashing through the trees. Then we did run for cover. Only we did not run, because no-one was capable of it. We patients walked slowly across the plateau towards the row of cubicles. So great was the fear of being hit by shrapnel that the sharp-edged granite chippings on which we walked on bare feet were as smooth as a hall carpet. Next morning, those who could hobbled painfully back across the stones to retrieve the footwear discarded in the night.

I had not made any demands to leave Les Vaux. I expected I would shortly be discharged and looked forward to living with the Woodman family. As a general rule, hospitals did not keep patients longer than necessary. So I was surprised to overhear a conversation between Matron and another patient from the top cubicles. They were screened by the trees but their voices were very clear. It seemed that this patient was complaining that I was allowed to walk up the valley when she was not. Matron was conciliatory. I heard her say that I was allowed some privileges because I would be at Les Vaux for 'a long time yet.'

I could not believe my ears. I could see that here was a dilemma. Should I have sought to discharge myself, all kinds of pressures could have been placed upon me by Matron, and to which Mr and Mrs Woodman, quite naturally and having my well-being at heart, would have conceded.

My dilemma was solved a few days later by the unexpected arrival of Mr Halliwell. He had not come especially to see me, but I happened to be on the forecourt as he arrived. He got out of his car and walked over to speak to me. Matron joined him. They stood there smiling at me, and before either of them spoke, I asked Mr Halliwell,

'May I go home?'

'Can you walk a mile?'

'Yes' (a lie, but allowed in the circumstances)

'Then you can go home.'

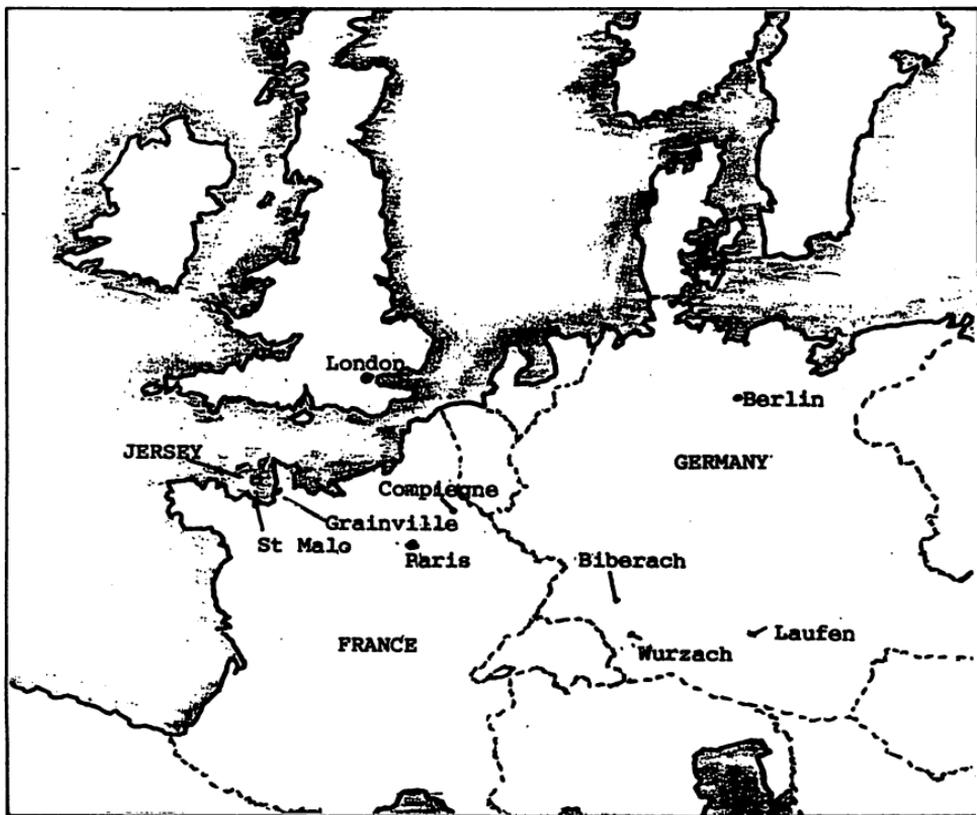
Why should the fact that I had spoken directly to Mr Halliwell be worth a comment? It was simply not done and I blushed with discomfort when I did so. Mr Halliwell and I had, over the months, developed a certain rapport, I feel sure of it, otherwise the strict rule of etiquette would have prevailed and to my question 'May I

go home?’ he would have replied ‘Let us see what Matron has to say.’

I believe that Matron, for her own reasons, wanted to keep me at Les Vaux, and but for Mr Halliwell’s unscheduled visit, my immediate future could have been settled without my having any say in the matter. Matron may have wanted to keep her eye on me, or she may have made some kind of a promise to my father but, happy with my victory, I thought it best not to enquire.

It was now August 1943, nearly two years and three months since I was admitted to the General Hospital. My good-byes said, I waited for Mr and Mrs Woodman in the hall, my bag packed. Times have changed over the past fifty years, but I was experiencing then a feeling that is universal and will never change.

I was going home.



Map of Europe

## **PART THREE**

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## Frémont

'You must remember that it is early days'. Early days .... Early days ... Like an echoing call, these words followed me down the weeks of my convalescence. But of all the people who were concerned for or about me, I was the least. I had been discharged from hospital with a certificate for extra rations of milk and butter, and I was forbidden for the time being to ride a bicycle (the only mode of transport) or to go dancing. I was also strongly advised to avoid crowded places where I might be jostled and, presumably, risk a fall. I was unperturbed, Cycling, dancing, a gathering of people, what were these? It was sufficient that I walked, albeit without grace, and with a certain amount of effort and concentration.

Such pleasure it was to have afternoon tea in the garden with Mrs Woodman and Fay.

At Frémont, the back garden was chosen because of its south facing aspect, as well as being more secluded.

The stranger at the gate would have noted the three women sitting at their ease, their summer frocks, the cups and saucers of fine china, decorated with roses, on the table. His eye would have been drawn down the garden, where ripening onions lay on the dry carefully weeded soil. He would have noted the precision of the rows, each onion separated from its neighbour, and into his

## FRÉMONT

mind would have flashed the vision of a rosette at the autumn show. Mrs Woodman would have been hospitable. As the stranger raised the cup of ersatz tea to his lips, only then would he have tasted the knowledge that something was not quite right.

I was as much a stranger to the realities.

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The following is an extract from Leslie Sinel's Diary *The German Occupation of Jersey 1940-1945*.

At the end of June 1943.

'After three years of Occupation the Island is in a state of destruction that must be seen to be believed. The roads are in a shocking state. An adult's rations at the moment are as follows (per week) Bread 3lb 12 ozs. Breakfast meal 6ozs. Meat 4ozs. Potatoes 5lb. Butter 2 ozs. Sugar 3ozs. Salt 3ozs. Milk 3½pts. Day in and day out it is one long scrounge to augment the meagre rations, and whenever anything extra is to be obtained in the shops, such as certain vegetables, long queues form rapidly.'

So the outward show of tea in the garden gave only the slightest indication of the facts of life; of an Island impoverished in nearly every respect. Houses remained intact. There were no bombing raids during the Occupation, nobody starved, and cold winters could be endured. It was the perpetual quest for supplies, together with the oppressive presence of the occupying power that stuck in peoples' gullets. That, and an uncertain future.

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## FRÉMONT

I was living at Frémont with Mr and Mrs Woodman and Fay, and I could not have been made to feel more welcome. The Woodmans stood, safely and surely, for the family I was missing so much.

Mrs Woodman (I came to call her Muss), tall with a full figure, well dressed, energetic, the house immaculate, and herself a very good cook. Mr Woodman, rather a foil to Muss' robust personality, a man soberly dressed, quiet, his manner nonetheless commanding, a stickler for order, but thoughtful and kind, certainly no one to be in awe of. And Fay, nearly my own age, tall and good looking. What I admired most about her at the time were the easy flowing limbs, a grace which I was, in some measure, determined to emulate.

Frémont was one of a short row of detached houses at the top of Wellington Road. A square house, with ample space separating it from its neighbours, it had an air of solid comfort. Its situation was on the outskirts of St Helier; fifteen minutes of brisk walking would bring one to the centre of town. The return journey took somewhat longer. There were two approaches, one by way of a gentle but continuous ascent and the other, more generally used, with a hill near the very end. The hill, quite steep as it neared the summit, formed the major part of Wellington Road, and I was ever confounded by its being so called. A hill is a hill, and was the more so during the Occupation. Once the top of the hill was reached one was nearly home, an appreciation deeply felt but unspoken on a winter's day, when a biting easterly wind almost took one's breath away.

The area surrounding Frémont was semi-rural. Distances are proportionate to the size of the Island, and farms were intermixed with private houses, usually detached and within their own gardens. Major roads crossed lanes too narrow for the passage of a car.

## FRÉMONT

Nearby stood St Saviour's Church, whose chimes I used to listen for on quiet nights at Overdale. I still listened for them sometimes, but as a timely reminder that curfew was at ten o'clock.

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After nearly two years in plaster I had expected my leg muscles to have some degree of atrophy, but I had not expected it to take so long to regain strength and endurance. Walking was the only therapy.

Paul came often to Frémont, and in the evenings we walked farther and farther afield through near-deserted lanes, too narrow even for tractors. Tangled swathes of hedgerow overgrowth, bent over by their own weight, lay at impossible angles in our path. Shafts of evening sunshine found a way through now and then, their rays hosts to a myriad of dancing insects. Avenues of gothic splendour fit for a fairytale? Or to the tidy minded or careful farmer a scene of hideous neglect and dereliction and cause for despair. It was late August, the summer nearly over.

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By mid November I could walk to town with confidence and without effort. I was seldom tired.

\*

'Come with me to a dance' Paul said. I demurred. 'If you are not allowed to dance, neither am I, because I shall be MC for the evening.' 'Come with me' he insisted. 'We will have a table next to the band and I will sit with you'.

How could I say 'No?' And it really was a wonderful idea. I was already deciding which frock I would wear.

The dance was a private one, held at the Plaza Ballroom in St Helier, where Wests Centre is now. At that time it was part of a complex which included the Plaza Cinema (always known as Wests) and an arcade housing a row of small shops and the Café Bleu.

We arrived early. Paul was occupied with last minute adjustments to the programme, and so I sat at our table and watched people arriving and taking possession of the tables surrounding the dance floor. With a kind of dismay I saw Mr Halliwell enter with a party and seat themselves almost directly opposite.

The band struck up, Paul announced the first number, and dancers began to take the floor. I could do nothing but sit and wait as Mr Halliwell, his style and elegance remembered, made his way toward me. He came straight to the point, in exactly the same manner as when he had first addressed me in the clinic at the General Hospital two years previously.

'I see it is a fait accompli' he said 'in which case you will dance with me'. He led me onto the dance floor and we waltzed, sedately and mostly in silence, keeping well away from the other dancers. I had the sick feeling that the whole evening had turned into a disaster and smarted at the unspoken criticism, which was so totally unjust.

I danced with Mr Halliwell once more that evening. It was to be my ration, but this time my resentment had flown and it was all pleasure. After all, how many patients celebrate their return to normal life by dancing with their consultant? Did I say normal life? I had made my debut on a very strange stage indeed.

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## Compiègne

‘Following the fall of France in 1940 the Germans set up French POW camps in France known as Frontslager, which were also used for civilian internees. Compiègne, outside Paris, was one of these, and it was used as a transit camp during the February deportation of 1943’.

‘A total of one hundred and thirty women, children, and men over sixty-four years of age were accommodated in Compiègne from April 1943 while their male relatives were sent on to Laufen and Kreuzburg’.

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The above are two short extracts from Roger E. Harris’s book *Islanders Deported*. They simply state the facts. But from the cards and lettercards I received while I was still at Les Vaux, seventeen in all, little more emerged about the camp itself. The emphasis was always on the fact that, for the Channel Islands internees, this was a transit camp.

The true nature and the degrading conditions in the camp at Compiègne would not be described until after the War, and then only by those who wished to disclose them.

'Dad and I arrived here 15th Feb. Michael not with us'.

This was the first postcard I received from my father and Ruby. I handled it carefully, reading the message not only as it presented itself, but looking for words behind the words written by Ruby, and for oppression behind the printed form of identification of the sender on the address side. *Vor-und Zurname*: R E Still. *Gefangenenummer*: 10051.

The rest of the message was cheerful. I was relieved but not satisfied. Was there something of the 'don't tell Peggy, she might be upset' syndrome left over? There was, undoubtedly. But that could work both ways. Whistling in the dark has always been known to be beneficial.

After that first postcard via *Kriegsgefangenenpost* I was to receive a postcard or letter card weekly and before very long was able to send letters in return, also parcels. As time went on our letters to each other were governed by a kind of equanimity which seemed natural in a time of waiting, and was to last until the liberation of the camps and the end of the War.

Ruby was the letter writer. My father wrote but rarely. His cursive script could not compete with Ruby's, which was minuscule. The number of words that Ruby could fit into a limited space constituted a work of art; but my father wrote many postscripts of love and encouragement, idealistic in content rather than informative. They were showing different aspects in their characters; Ruby, the cherished one, had become practical, while my father leaned towards rosy visions of the future.

In 'Ruby's story' I have drawn on my cards and letter cards and added, here and there, some remarks Ruby let fall after the War. Truth, as ever, is unclear, but I have put her name to it. All letters to and from the camps were heavily censored, destroyed if the censor saw fit; the writer was therefore prudent. The habit of 'not whingeing' was also very strong.

Descriptions have been given of the transports used in the deportations of 1942, and there is no reason to believe that the condition of the boat that took my father, Ruby and Michael from Jersey to St Malo was any different. Again from Roger E Harris's book *Islanders Deported*: (Here Roger E Harris quotes Frank Falla from his book *The Silent War*).

"(It) was a 'cleaned up' coal boat totally unfit for human habitation; not a suggestion of sanitation, crawling with lice and fleas and, into the bargain, quite unseaworthy. It had been used to transport Nazi slave workers."

Once more from Roger E Harris:—

'The separation of families on the 1943 deportations was probably the most callous act committed by the Germans during the whole of the deportation saga, the more so because they had given many of the men the option of taking their families with them, only to separate them once they reached French soil. To be fair to the Germans this separation was probably not planned but was indicative of the crowded state of the internment camps, and especially in the lack of facilities for women and children'.

This issue had already been solved for Ruby and my father. They would be staying together. But what of Michael? I do not know when he became aware that, when the train reached Paris, he would be carried on with the younger men towards an unknown destination.

## RUBY'S STORY

'St Helier Harbour 13th Feb 1943

The accommodation on this boat is appalling. The seating is simply benches in the hold. It was heartbreaking to come back here this evening, after having been sent home last night. The boat had engine trouble. I doubt if it is seaworthy. I still wonder why they are deporting us, when they so definitely told us that, if Peg was unfit, we could stay. Ours not to reason why, I suppose. The German Military Doctor did his best for us. Bert is sixty, but his identity card says sixty-five. Michael is only sixteen. We are due to leave for St Malo at 7.00 pm. The journey should not take long. It appears we are part of a group of petty criminals just released from jail. I wish Peg were with us. Bert and Michael are very quiet. So am I. It is only my thoughts which speak so loudly.

14th Feb The sea passage was vile, the more so on passing Corbière and then, did she roll. The indirect route must have been taken because of activity in the area. No wonder it took three hours to reach St Malo.

I was seasick under awful conditions. Luckily, we had the piedish. We shared it and emptied the contents on the floor. As the boat lurched, so did our wooden benches, and so did we.

At St Malo we were obliged to remain on board. We were six women, our companions for the night mostly men who had done time. Thank goodness I have a sense of humour and can see the funny side. Some Guernsey people slept on the train which had been waiting for us, and as we arrived and walked along the platform I heard someone say 'look at these jailbirds who have come to join us'.

## COMPIÈGNE

15th Feb

We were nearly twenty hours in the train before reaching Paris. Michael has gone on ahead with the younger men. It was 5 am and quite dark when we arrived. We climbed into horse drawn wagons, sat on straw, and were driven to this place (Compiègne).

We are eighteen women in a room with beds and stoves. At the moment we are treated with consideration and have sufficient food. Compiègne is a transit camp, so we should be moved soon. Our trunks from home are being sent to our next destination. I am looking forward to the train journey and Michael at the end of it.

27th Feb

We are still here. Yesterday we received a very nice American Red Cross parcel, which is much appreciated as our stores are exhausted. The Americans are very good to us. The camp is divided into three sections, separated by barbed wire. The Americans have their own very good arrangements but the French, in their section, are very harshly treated. They are not allowed to pick up bread which finds itself on their side of the wire. If they should make a small fire, it is kicked over by the guards. They march into camp singing the Marseillaise. There is always the sound of shooting at night.

24th March

There is no news of our moving, rumour has it early in April, but we take no notice and just live from day to day.

The scenery is to be admired from a distance, a tall church tower, red roofs around it; the river with barges, of which one can only see the tops, and many passing trains.

In our section of the camp is the cemetery with eleven white crosses on which the searchlights play at night, so

## COMPIÈGNE

it is quite weird when we go to the 'glory holes' last thing before we go to bed.

Lemonade, apples and beer have been sold here. We get very tired of swede soup and long for a solid diet.

Bert is fit. If it were not for him, I would be feeling very down. I wish we could hear from Michael. We do not know where the men are, but relieved to have had a letter from Peg.

5th April

We have heard from Michael! By his description Laufen (where he is in camp) sounds beautiful but, quoting from his last sentence 'although this camp described may seem like a paradise to you, I am home and family sick, and longing to see you'. I hope it will be soon. There is nothing but rumour as to when we are going, so I do not attach much importance to a given date.

The weather is warm and fine, yesterday the Americans gave an open air concert on their side of the wire. We, on grass plot, this side of the wire. The whole camp was present. There was a wonderful string band with variety turns in between. It was much appreciated by a very enthusiastic audience.

18th April

This life is getting monotonous. Every day is the same. We are still on swede soup. Our day is organised as follows: breakfast at eight: wash and tidy up till eleven: exercise until arrival of soup at mid-day, quickly consumed: rest from 12.30 to 2 pm and adjourn to the green plot by the cemetery with knitting, if any: four o'clock, tea with Bert, the best and biggest meal of the day. After tea, exercise until seven, curfew at eight-thirty, bed at ten o'clock. One gets very tired of walking over the same ground, and so limited, but it has been a fine day. Funny how a little sunshine makes all the difference.

## COMPIÈGNE

25th April

We are receiving three Red Cross parcels a month.

The Easter holiday has passed with church services. Some imaginative dishes were made with the contents of Red Cross parcels, as well as the famous swede soup.

29th April

We have just heard that we are leaving tomorrow at 6 am for Biberach by express train, a journey of approximately thirty hours. We have been given rations for two days – a whole loaf, butter and sausage per person, also a Red Cross parcel.

Later the same evening ..... The order has been cancelled. We were told to return our rations. One of the women had boiled her sausage, and presented it, steaming, to the German in charge, who impatiently waved it away. On her way back to her room Bert caught her up. 'Give me that for a minute' he said. The same sausage made several successful trips. Now we have to unpack. The room looks like a jumble sale.

14th May

We are having a heat wave. I hope summer dresses are packed in our trunk, also my Leghorn hat ..... The orders are that we are moving on or before the 21st, but it is becoming a joke now.

21st May

The train is pulling out of Compiègne station .....

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## Lunch at the Aurora

In January 1944 the weather turned frosty, crisp and dry, apart from showers of hail. In the offices of Barton, Mayhew & Co, and in the absence of any heating, it was as if the cold had numbed all other odours and produced a peppery smell of its own, astringent and nose-tingling; ones nostrils felt the need to expand to accommodate it. The small open fire in the general office smouldered, but it had always been a non starter.

We wore what clothing we could, compatible with freedom of movement. Mr Fairlie wore fingerless gloves. I thought this the negation of fashion and would not have been seen dead wearing them. EPH wore his deer stalker of brown tweed. He walked up and down more often than usual, from one end of his office to the other, jingling the small change in his trouser pockets, both from frustration and a desire to keep warm. In his office, Mr Mimmack was uncomplaining about the cold. He sat at his desk and, before commencing work, he tried out different substitutes for tobacco such as the dried leaves of blackberry bushes. In each experiment he had to draw furiously on his pipe to get it going, smoke billowing all round him, but he never lost his even temper.

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## LUNCH AT THE AURORA

I was pleased and surprised when I was asked if I would like to return to my job with Barton, Mayhew & Co. Mr Fairlie merely remarked that my replacement had been unsatisfactory.

I worked in the general office from daylight, around 10 a.m. until dusk, between five and six o'clock, with an hour for lunch. There was little to do. There was no correspondence to speak of apart from paying the monthly bills. I realised that my usefulness was that of ..... perhaps the expression 'anchor man' is apt .... I manned the office and was frequently asked to 'hold the fort' while one, two or three men were out of the office on undisclosed business. I was regarded as someone they could trust.

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Until the summer, when I was given permission to cycle, I lunched in town. Mr Woodman had used his influence with Mrs Le Gresley of the Aurora Hotel in Cattle Street, St. Helier and I was admitted to the select few who ate there.

It was a short walk from Hill Street to the Aurora; along Halkett Place with its closed shops, some closed for the lunch hour, others permanently. Across the street decorative iron railings enclosed the fruit and vegetable market; its iron gates, promising much but providing little, were enlivened by a frieze depicting small animals. They too were closed. There were so few people on the streets at this hour that I sometimes felt that I was the only pedestrian in St Helier. I turned into Beresford Street, and after a hundred yards or so, into Cattle Street, and then to push open the door of the Aurora. The dining room was on my left.

## LUNCH AT THE AURORA

The dining room was similar to that of a bar restaurant in France, functional rather than decorative, and of a brownness that seemed to have emanated from the bar to include the small tables, bentwood chairs and linoleum on the floor. Windows, screened for half their height, looked on to the street, giving privacy from passers-by but, in the absence of any lighting making the dining room rather dark.

I sat at my table for one and waited to be served with the soup.

I have heard children describe consommé as soup with nothing in it. Consommé at the Aurora was very nearly nothing with nothing in it, apart from the colour and a peppery taste; but it was blessedly hot. The main course was mince, not too finely cut and inevitably grey, not having had the benefit of pre-frying. A boiled potato and, because it was winter, a leek, were placed on the side. The leek needed to be examined closely for traces of ground, but in so casual manner that no criticism of the management might be implied.

The edge being taken off one's appetite, dessert was to follow. This was a blancmange, its set obtained by the use of carragheen moss, its colour shocking pink. Carragheen moss was very time consuming to process, which would account for the occasional frond sticking out from its glacial sides. Substitute coffee (black) ended the meal and, because I had not been well, I was given a biscuit, thin and hard due to the absence of baking powder. The menu never changed. The price of lunch was 1 Reichmark (2/1½d.)

One day I asked Paul if he would lunch with me at the Aurora. The invitation was in the form of a dispensation from Mrs Le Gresley, because she had connections with the Boléat family. My anticipation of the pleasure of

## LUNCH AT THE AURORA

having someone share my table knew no bounds. And then there was the food .....

Years later, I asked Paul if he remembered having lunch with me at the Aurora, and he said, drily, that yes it had stayed in his memory, because of cycling home to Le Hocq afterwards to find something to eat.

I would not have foregone my lunches at the Aurora. They gave a pleasing normality to the day and, in the fact that a menu was produced at all, understated a civilised response to what my father liked to call the 'iron heel' of the Germans.

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## Biberach

The following extract from Roger E Harris' book *Islanders Deported* help to set the scene which my father and Ruby entered in the early summer of 1943.

'The little town of Biberach by the River Riss, on a plateau 1,800 feet above seal-level and within view of the Bavarian Alps, was the location of the first and largest of the internment camps used by the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* to house the Channel Islands deportees. The internees were lucky to be taken here, for this was a very healthy place, high on the top of a hill with rolling fields around in which the ploughs were drawn by oxen, and dense forest-clad hills beyond. Even the most disingenuous of the internees could not fail to admit to the beauty of the area, and many in their first letters home wrote about the bright sunshine and glorious air, though the chilling cold and the snows which arrived in mid-November were soon to temper some of those views.

Biberach was a neat, orderly Bavarian-like town with timberframe houses and two high landmarks, the tower of the church in the centre of the town, and the tower of the castle on its outskirts.

The camp, like the town, was orderly, with some twenty-three barrack huts in neat rows surrounded by barbed wire fences with observation towers at intervals.

## BIBERACH

The German Authorities expected the internment camps to function as self-supporting, self correcting communities responsible for their own internal organisation and subject to as little outside control as possible. When the Channel Islands internees arrived at Biberach the camp was still under the control of the Wehrmacht, but the army wanted to rid themselves of this responsibility as soon as possible and so by December 1942 the Home Office was responsible for the camp, and control and security came from the local police. Internees were elected to positions of authority and many other people worked to ensure the efficient running of the camp.'

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'We have been interned for a year to-day. Special dance to-night for Compiègners to celebrate, so shall not be going to whist .....' So began Ruby's card from Biberach dated 12th February 1944.

My father and Ruby had arrived at Biberach on the 24th May 1943. Everything is relative, and they found it to be a relief, after the conditions at Compiègne. Both had lost over a stone in weight in the previous three months.

So it was almost a year ago when Ruby wrote;

'At last we have arrived at Biberach. We left Compiègne Station at 8.35 am arriving here 11.00 pm. This camp is one and a half miles from the station, those who could, walked, mostly uphill, moonlight, so I thoroughly enjoyed it. This is a big camp, well organised, quite different from Compiègne, situated at the top of a steep hill, looking across fields and forests towards the Alps, which are visible after rain. We were

given a Red Cross Parcel on arrival. I am in a room with sixteen, eight double-deckers, I sleep in the lower bunk. We are allowed to go for an escorted walk once a week. The entertainments comprising whist, dances, concerts, sports etc organised each week. We are hoping Michael will join us soon. Dad and I are in good health, but oh! I am longing for the comforts of home life'. (Michael did join them, from Laufen, on the 9th August, looking 'taller and a trifle thinner'.)

\*

'This is a big camp, and well organised'. It was to these conditions that each person had to adjust, the majority making the best of it, and a very few, apart from the fact of their internment, actually finding themselves in their element.

Boredom in the camp was relieved by all manner of entertainments, provided by the internees themselves. This from Ruby: 'Next week, "Tons of Money" booking office open at 10.00 am and the people take their stools and queue up from 7.00 till 10.00. Anyone would think it was a London theatre'. Over the months Ruby and my father became formidable bridge players, often winning prizes in competition or tournament. These prizes were very often cigarettes, which had become a form of currency. Ruby again: 'out of my winnings I exchanged fifteen cigarettes for a tin of pilchards'.

My father participated in sporting activities, usually as a judge. On one occasion he won the over 50s race and afterwards, according to Ruby, he suffered from a great sense of shame because, on being given a handicap for the race, he could not disclose the fact that he was five years younger than his official age. He felt it to be as much a disgrace as cheating at cards.

I had no real worries about their physical well-being. They received splendid 'Next of Kin' parcels from England and the family in Canada on a regular basis, and most important, many letters and a limited number of family photographs from England; in fact the amount of family news circulating between England, Germany and Jersey was a revelation, never again to be repeated.

The letters I received from Biberach gave little hint of any distress. They were social letters, and even if they had been uncensored, I doubt if their contents would have been any different. I expect that my letters were similar in tone, with comments on the weather or the account of a picnic or a dance (there was much dancing in the Occupation.) But then again, when the challenge of a situation is met, it is only afterwards that one realises that one has been walking along the edge of a precipice. It is then that a realisation and reaction occurs, its repercussions though ever fainter, to remain for the rest of one's life.

Ruby fared better in the camp at Biberach than my father. She wrote of her objection to communal life, but at the same time it was natural for her to enjoy being part of a social scene, and she was more able to enter the spirit of things with enthusiasm. My father, less sociable, felt the lack of personal privacy most sorely. 'Camp life goes on in much the same old way, same old round, all day'. The words 'all day' said it all. He was not completely fit and must many times have wished to take off the social mask and just be himself and, naturally, elsewhere.

I wondered if he sometimes withdrew into a sense of remembered pleasure, as sharp and as keen as the escapism in which I had indulged when at Overdale. Did he perhaps recall, in minute detail, days of low-water fishing in late summer, among the rocks that lined the base of St Catherine's breakwater? Did he smell the

## BIBERACH

*vraic*, half exposed at low tide and bunched up in broad glistening ribbons; or feel the sudden pressure of those brown fronds just below the surface as, every now and then, a light surge sent them to entwine his legs, languorously, before retreating? Could he have drawn out the minutes of peaceful solitude, broken only by the cries of gulls and the tiny crepitations of small molluscs left high and dry? And turned at last .....to the drawing in of the net with its catch of furiously leaping prawns? I think it not unlikely.

I should note that a Yacht Club now flourishes in the area of the breakwater. The days of peace and solitude have long gone and, I suspect, the prawns.

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## Invasion

### PROCLAMATION

To the Population of the Island of Jersey.

Germany's enemy is on the point of attacking French soil. I expect the population of Jersey to keep its head, to remain calm, and to refrain from any acts of sabotage and from hostile acts against the German Forces, even should the fighting spread to Jersey. At the first signs of unrest or trouble I will close the streets to every traffic and will secure hostages.

Attacks against the German Forces will be punishable by death.

*Der Kommandant der Festung Jersey.*

(Signed) HEINE

*Oberst.*

Jersey, 6th June, 1944

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From the early hours and well into a morning of hazy sunshine, the invasion fleet could be heard high in the

## INVASION

sky. The noise was no more than the drone from a swarm of bees, but to those on the ground it was the roar of retribution. For hour after hour the steady drone continued, as wave after wave of aircraft passed overhead, building a relentless pressure in the advance.

The deep satisfaction felt by the civilians, our Cheshire cat grins, be they ever so quick to fade into accustomed inscrutability, must have been visible even to the Germans.

During the evening Paul and I walked from Le Hocq, through the by-roads and leafy lanes of early summer, home to Frémont. We walked slowly, wheeling the bicycles against the gentle gradients and when, at a crossroads, an armed German soldier rose up from his position of camouflage to scrutinise us, his helmet wreathed in trails of greenery..... in modern parlance, we fell about laughing.

\*

As a new broom sweeps clean, so the invasion of France by the Allies on the 6th June 1944 swept over and around the Channel Islands, with Jersey no more than an extra large pebble in its path, to be attended to later.

In March, outriders of the invasion force were seen as vapour trails high in the sky. By the end of April hardly a day passed without Allied aircraft flying over the Island, and at the beginning of June everyone's expectations were high. By the end of August the battle had moved away from us and into France.

So much was happening, and we had so little cognition of it.

In one of his hilariously funny sketches, Spike Milligan is asked a question 'What were you doing there?' to which he replies, plaintively, 'People have got to be

somewhere'. This is a profound statement, to be considered seriously in regard to would-be on-the-spot commentators. To be 'somewhere' near the hub of a dramatic event for an extended period of time is given to a comparative few, and the stories they tell have a universal appeal. In France to-day, long after the War, you might hear someone say he, or she, was a hero of the Resistance, and he, or she, has a story to tell. It would follow that many thousand members of the Resistance had, therefore, no story to tell. It was, simply, that their stories were different, and to be more quietly savoured. Most remained untold, and some may have been as light and as murmurous as a summer's breeze, nevertheless they were a part of the broad scene, and without their authors' presence dramatic events would never have taken place.

So, in the Channel Islands, when we were in the zone of operations, both naval and military, everyone in Jersey had a story to tell, but only a few would hold high drama. Some stories would have included pictures of fires blazing along the French coast; some have brutish images of people forced from their homes, to allow for machine gun emplacements. A German soldier's story would have had an element of farce as he described the fish market in St Helier, before taking first pick of the spider crabs the fine June weather had brought inshore; another German's story, never to be told, contained terror and death on board a blazing minesweeper in the Island approaches. An important story would be the one where a farmer lifted his potatoes to the sound of continuous heavy bombing from France, less than fifteen miles away.

Because we, at Frémont, lived well away from the coast and other prohibited military zones such as the Airport, the sounds of battle were muted. Nor were we adjacent to one of the machine-gun posts that seemed to

## INVASION

be springing up all around. During the months of June, July and August, when the Channel Islands were in the zone of operations, the only German presence nearby was that of the personal bodyguard of a high ranking German Officer who lived in a large house called Mount Royal, at the end of the row. My bedroom was at the front of the house, overlooking a small garden and the road, and the guard's steady tread on night patrol continued, as it had all winter, to be a sombre and unlikely lullaby.

If the battle for France was not in our sight, it was in our hearing. Everyone was up-to-date with the BBC bulletins, despite severe penalties for having such knowledge. We each had private sources of information and the news was never discussed. To this day I am not aware of where or when Mr Woodman, Muss or Fay heard the news, or whether they listened together, or singly, or if at all.

\*

From the start of the invasion, barges bringing supplies from France were harried along the French coast from port to port until, with the fall of the port of St Malo, it was only Channel Islands ports which remained open.

From Leslie Sinel's *Diary* dated 31st August –  
'The Island being entirely cut off from supplies, conditions are gradually deteriorating, and not improved by the fact that the German Forces here number nearly sixteen thousand.

On behalf of the Superior Council of the States, the Bailiff has forwarded a Memorandum to the Occupying Authorities, calling attention to the serious situation which will arise in the Island in the event of the existing state of siege being prolonged.'

## INVASION

From what was a lengthy document and which included a report by the Medical Officer of Health, to the ordinary person two things stood out. First, the Insular Government enjoined the Occupying Authorities to comply with International Law in not unnecessarily endangering the health of the people of Jersey by prolonging the siege; and secondly, that the Insular Government had just learned, with dismay, that the Occupying Powers were of the opinion that the siege could be maintained until January 1st, 1945.

The Woodmans and I sat quietly at supper, leaving just a little on our plates, to be scraped off later to fill Mick the cat's dish.

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## Frémont

There is no one on Wellington Road until the lunch hour approaches. The hill remains empty of people and also of character, being wide, without shade, and dusty now that the weather has turned hot. Then a ragged assembly begins to form at the foot of the hill, those walking being joined by those dismounting from their bicycles. No one is in too much of a hurry, and we straggle across the road in twos and threes. We have come to know each other, and are sociable.

Carlyle Le Gallais turns the corner, and we move to allow for his pony and trap. His will be the only vehicle, and Mr Le Gallais is scrupulously fair in offering each of the ladies a lift. But it will be no 'flick of the whip and away': as the hill steepens the pony will walk at the same rate as the rest of us. It is my turn to ride, and as we jog along my self-confidence is being tested to the full, sitting high above the rest and not knowing whether to catch someone's eye, when my smiles might begin to turn into a giggle, or whether to look straight ahead, and be dignified.

Only one other rides to-day, and she is a baby in a pram of the (now) old-fashioned kind, sturdy and durable. Pat has harnessed her large dog, with reins attached to the handle of the pram. The dog looks

pleased with himself, performing his useful task. Liking to show off, I suppose. We are indeed a motley crowd. Farther up the hill a group of little boys are shouting at, rather than talking to, each other. They are likely to still be there after we have passed, until someone is sent to call them in. Between us and the boys three Germans are walking. The little boys' voices carry. One of them begins every other sentence with 'My dad says this' or 'My dad says that'. As the Germans pass them, one of them asks 'Where is your dad, then?'. 'My dad's away, and when he comes back he's going to shoot the lot of you'. The German shrugs and continues walking up the hill. We shrug, and look at each other.

\*

Summertime. What a honey of a word!

The summer of 1944 was, for me, an extraordinarily happy time. Happy? Living on a small island surrounded by a military zone, with every inch of the coastline defended by heavy armament? With the sands of its beaches laid with mines and entrenched with tank traps? With being a prisoner of war, because we were all that, the internment camp being simply on a larger scale, the barbed wire not immediately visible? With the Island being in a state of siege, cut off from all supplies?

Happiness is a state of mind and blossoms in unlikely places. My happiness, or contentment, grew largely from the fact that after a year's convalescence I was pronounced fit. I had not the slightest doubt in my medical report, however it was arrived at. The shadow of TB, which had persisted in the background, was gone for ever. I could feel it in my bones.

At last I was allowed to ride a bicycle. It may be difficult for anyone to understand the value placed on a

bicycle, but without it I was effectively grounded. My old Hercules semi-sports model, war weary and the tyres perished, was fitted with 'tyres' cut to size from an old motor car tyre. They were not pneumatic, and I soon learned why permission to ride had been delayed for so long. The bicycle was as the original bone-shaker.

\*

At Frémont, Muss, Fay and I still had afternoon tea in the garden. Seemingly nothing had changed from a year ago. The onions and haricot beans ripened in the sunshine. The tea table, with its fine china, retained its elegance. Our summer frocks were (to us) no less fashionable. As before, the outward show contrived to mask a serious situation which at any time might turn into a dangerous one.

I wonder at the potency of the words 'afternoon tea'. It is such an English thing, long established as the yardstick of comfortable living. To add 'in the garden' was the proverbial gilt on the gingerbread, intimating that it would always be summer. Ruby, in her early letters from Biberach, asking if I were walking well, would add 'I can picture you having tea in the garden'. It was her assurance that all was well.

\*

Muss was alone at Frémont when the Germans came. They were two, an Officer and a Sergeant. Muss opened the door to their knock, and at once they were in the hall. They wished to see over the house, they said, with a view to taking it over for themselves.

This was the face of the enemy who, having by proclamation solemnly guaranteed the property of the

Island's peaceful inhabitants, were nevertheless quite prepared, under a cloak of politeness, to plunder and demean.

It was 1944, and not the first days of the Occupation, when fear and intimidation might have produced an expected response. That Muss was alarmed, most certainly; but alarm and anxiety would have been overtaken quickly by suppressed anger in what she saw as nothing less than effrontery.

Such anger, if perceived at all, was carelessly ignored. Muss was a tall and able women; with her colour risen and a tightening of the lips, the downstairs rooms were displayed.

Now to the upstairs. One after another the doors were opened. The master bedroom; the second bedroom; the bathroom, and it was then Muss said she must have been inspired. She threw open the door of the single bedroom at the front of the house, which was mine. It had a balcony and the glass door was open. Turning to the German Officer, Muss said, as if by way of explanation, 'This is the room of my daughter, who has TB'.

The viewing was over, the Germans had left. A black comedy had been played out in less than twenty minutes. In fact, the Germans had not simply left but, according to Muss, had been out of the house like a shot.

Nothing more was ever heard about the house being taken over, nor was the prospect anticipated. There was an acquired resilience to such incidents in those days.

And I? I was unruffled in my contentment. I, too, had laughed with the family and TB was just another word.

\*

The summer days slipped by. It was a time of comparative plenty, when some private houses and farms

opened their doors and offered lunch or afternoon tea. Lunch would be taken in the dining room of the house, with windows wide open and very often the sounds of children playing in the garden. There would be two courses and 'coffee'. The menu, like that of the Aurora, never changed; a nest of potato filled with summer vegetables would be served, the dessert perhaps a small dish of perfectly ripe golden gooseberries. Nouvelle cuisine was never so fine as this.

By contrast, afternoon tea at a farm had a more secretive air about it. One stepped down into a shady parlour. Climbing roses might be glimpsed through lace curtains, further clouding the windows. Some of these parlours only came to life, particularly in our present circumstances, on family occasions or for Christmas. The air in them had a static quality, so that we spoke in undertones as if to disturb it as little as possible. A small bowl of raspberries would be brought, and a cake made from potato flour, and 'tea'.

In late August, with only the occasional aircraft to be seen and few cars on the road, the countryside in the centre of Jersey had reverted to another age, when the farm cart was the norm and there were no street lamps; and should they have been mooted, a parishioner would not have been held to ridicule if he said 'Why do we want street lamps? I can find my way about'.

In 1944 we had no street lamps ..... but we could see the stars.

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## Siege

As fireworks are never without significance, closing a chapter, so the summer of my euphoria and personal celebration came to an end, as surely as the last rocket's coloured stars fell to earth, and it was time to pack up and go home.

It was now November and the time of comparative plenty was passed. A very chill wind was being felt, and it was not yet winter.

The Germans were hungry. A German soldier came knocking at the door of the kitchen at Rocklands, Le Hocq, begging for food. Paul's mother opened the door. He asked for butter. Her answer was brief. 'There is no butter'. He still stood there, this boy in uniform, one of a number of boys and old men who made up the Army of Occupation in the last months of the war, and just before the door closed he pointed across the farmyard to where some mangolds, grown as animal feed, lay in a rough heap. 'Take what you want'. Mrs Boléat closed the door, and crossed the kitchen to where a small side window looked on to the lane running beside the farm. She drew the curtain aside and I joined her, waiting, needing to know that the German had left the farmyard. He came out of the gate with a couple of mangolds, and as he set off up the lane he was already biting into one of them, the wet ground still clinging to it.

Unlike the civilians who, over the last four years, had devised ways and means to supplement the meagre rations, the ordinary soldier, unless he had enough money to buy on the black market, and most had not, had to rely on his rations. In August it was understood that the German bread ration was cut to half a pound per day, and that there was much dissatisfaction with regard to their rations, which consisted mainly of potato soup. It was now November.

It was said, during the Occupation, that anything could be bought on the black market, even chocolates and silk stockings. Those who could, were more likely to buy a piece of meat now and then. Prices were way above most peoples' pockets. I had no contacts and little money, and only once came in the way of a piece of black market meat. A package was put into my hand, sight unseen, and I handed over one and a half times my week's wages. I cannot remember how the meat tasted, or even what it was, but I well remember my elation at the time of the transaction. It was as if I had brought off a successful coup.

There was also barter, but that was something different. Both were insurance of a kind, to be cashed in if the going got rough. There must have come a time for some when a pair of antique Jersey silver salt cellars would be considered fair exchange for a leg of pork.

I now see Muss as a miracle worker in the way that she produced palatable meals from an old-fashioned kitchen range. The rations could almost be discounted, apart from my ration of extra milk. A basic menu at Frémont would have been as follows: breakfast, 'fried ' potatoes; lunch, vegetables and a small piece of meat followed by a pudding with sugar-beet syrup (home produced black treacle) as a sauce; supper, baked beans and bread and a little butter. A snack was unheard of. The food was

## SIEGE

good and satisfying and never palled. Hunger, as is well known, is the best appetizer.

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It seems a strange thing to say, but of any group of people put in the position of withstanding a siege we, in the Channel Islands, must surely have been the most favourably placed. The reason for this was our temperate climate, mixed farming economy, and a fertile soil which produced all-year round crops. I never once had the feeling that we might be forced into starvation. That was on the conscious level. As for the subconscious, I was in Coventry shortly after the war had ended, and for the first time I felt fear. It was not any reaction to the sight of Coventry Cathedral, blown apart by the bombing and open to the sky; it was the sight of city streets and row upon row of red brick houses without one glimpse of green fields. They told me there would be no safety here. I wanted to leave. I had become wary, and the fact that the loaves of bread were in the bakers' shops gave little reassurance. I needed to see the wheat growing as well.

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During the first week of October 1944 it was announced by the BBC that a question regarding the Channel Islands in the House of Commons received the following answer 'The Germans in the Channel Islands have been given the chance to surrender, but have refused; there is nothing to show that they are not treating civilians properly'.

This is rather like telling a man with a pain in his stomach that really, he is quite well and has nothing to complain about; but at the end of November his pain was

still there. His one hope was that Red Cross supplies would soon arrive.

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So what of the Memorandum of the 31st August forwarded by the Bailiff to the Occupying Power, drawing attention to the seriousness of the Island situation?

At the same time as there was some complacency in the House of Commons regarding the plight of the Islanders, the Germans were showing a cavalier attitude in their acceptance of the Memorandum.

From the negotiations, which included persistent pressure from the Insular Government and delaying tactics by the German Authorities, I have drawn a thumbnail sketch of events during the last three months of the siege; for the population a seemingly endless wait for relief supplies.

From Leslie Sinel's *Diary* these brief extracts encapsulate the mood of the time.

**2nd Oct.** Extract from copy handed in to the *Evening Post* by the Commander of the Channel Islands. – the German Government has intimated its intention of taking the necessary steps in this (the situation regarding supplies) matter with the Protecting Power.

**11th Nov** An emergency meeting of the Superior Council was held to discuss the situation in the light of recent conversations held with high German officials; it was conveyed to the Council that the Germans had no intention of giving up the Island and that the Welfare of the civilian population was not their concern; they agreed, however, to send through their transmitter in Guernsey, a message from the Bailiff to the Protecting Power.

**14 Nov** It is learned that a message from the Bailiff to the Protecting Power was transmitted last night from Guernsey.

**8th Dec** Under the heading 'Red Cross Supplies on the way' the Bailiff had issued the following statement: I am officially informed by the German Military Authorities that a Red Cross ship was, weather permitting, due to leave Lisbon on Thursday December 7th for the Channel Islands. The ship will call at Guernsey first, en route for Jersey.

**19th Dec** A notice handed in to the *Evening Post* for publication by the Food Control with the headline 'The Red Cross parcels: unlikely to arrive for Christmas' was forbidden to appear by order of the German Censor.

**20th Dec** The Germans have now informed the local authorities that, according to information received, the Red Cross ship bringing supplies to the Channel Islands is due to leave Lisbon to-day (December 20th)

**23rd Dec** Last 'shopping day' before Christmas; weather cold, turning to drizzle in the afternoon. There was little to buy, the only things not secondhand being highly priced wooden toys, flowers, homemade Christmas cards and calendars.

**Christmas Day** Weather cold but sunny. Everyone made the most of this, we hope, last Christmas under such conditions. Many a sigh of relief was heard when at last the rabbit, fowl or duck made its appearance on the table for with robberies every night either by civilians or Germans, one could never be sure what would happen ....

**30th Dec** After weeks of arduous waiting, our hopes were realised at 5.45 this evening when the International Red Cross ship Vega entered St Helier's Harbour and took up her berth at the end of the Albert Pier; she was flying the flag of the International Red Cross at her foremast, her house flag at the main, and the Swedish flag

## SIEGE

astern, while on her superstructure were two illuminated red crosses.

**31st Dec** The discharge of the Vega commenced at 8.30 this morning, and by the end of the day 250 tons had been unshipped. One of the facts emerging from a conference of officials held in the afternoon and subsequently published by the *Evening Post* was as follows:

It is hoped to maintain the Vega on the Lisbon-Channel Islands service and it is estimated that the round trip, including the loading at Lisbon and the discharge in the Islands, will take about one month. The ideal monthly cargo has been decided upon as

500 tons of flour

1 Red Cross parcel for every person once a month

Medical supplies

Other lesser priorities were considered.

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## Cushions for the yacht 'Aphrodite'

The offices at No 16 Hill Street were again like an ice-box, and the large safe in the yard at the back of the premises was its fast freeze compartment. The safe was a monster. It housed important documents, private ledgers and minute books. To stand out of doors and manipulate its locks with numb fingers, only to discover that the prize was a slab of ice; to clasp the minute book to my bosom, else it would have slipped from my grasp, as I went upstairs to the office; to return the minute book, the meeting over, the minutes typed and the sheet pasted to the appropriate page, to its rightful place; and the heavy inner door of the safe swung shut on a morgue, in every sense of the word. This is my memory of working at Barton, Mayhew & Co during the spell of bitter weather in the winter of 1944/45.

No 16 Hill Street was a very old building, being a good example of a town house in the mid-18th-century. From its wide front door an equally wide passage, stone flagged, gave direct access to the yard, interrupted on the left-hand side by a staircase leading to the upper rooms of this three storied house. The yard was not large, simply a bare rectangular space. There were two lavatories at one end, and along one side an open shed sheltering the large safe and with enough room alongside to park the bicycles.

## CUSHIONS FOR THE YACHT 'APHRODITE'

Why so much emphasis on the yard? Was not the running of the office to be enlarged on, as showing a fine example of 'business as usual' in adverse and unpleasant circumstances? Business as usual went without saying. Audits were carried out, bills issued and bills paid – but the centre of operations was the yard.

Fuel for our one small fire in the general office was running low. As everything to do with making fires was a male prerogative, so everyone but I had a hand in, or offered advice on making briquettes. For some reason, all briquettes made in the Occupation seemed to be egg shaped. These 'eggs' were used to bank up a good fire so that its heat would be retained for hours.

A great deal of activity went on, downstairs in the yard. EPH was often up and down the stairs, deerstalker on his head, hands in his pockets, presumably overseeing the operation. The 'eggs' for our fire were made from our ration of coal-dust, tar (which had to be fetched from the Gas Works), and sawdust, if available. Everything was stirred up in buckets, then shaped by hand and the 'eggs' laid out in rows to dry and to harden.

This kind of communal work kept everyone warm, to some extent. No-one really wanted to sit in the office, and no-one was really surprised when the addition of 'eggs' to the back of our little fire, far from extending its life, actually put it out.

As if a challenge had been issued, Mr Fairlie put in an application for the firm to buy a standing tree. Its cost was £8. It was not a large tree, but much sawing and chopping needed to be done to provide logs of the right size. The yard came into its own again. The smell of sawdust, drifting up the stairs, was pleasant; everyone became cheerful in the thought that this was a far better idea than the making of briquettes.

## CUSHIONS FOR THE YACHT 'APHRODITE'

After about a week, a basket of logs was brought upstairs, in triumph, to the General Office. A good fire was started, but the logs were green and did little more than hiss and splutter in the grate. Again, no-one was surprised. The whole concept of a roaring fire in our inadequate little fireplace was just a form of escapism, I suspect, exhilarating while it lasted. Then the cold spell came to an end and everyone forgot about the lack of a fire.

The only glow in the offices of No 16 Hill Street that winter came from a different source entirely. I accompanied Mr Mimmack on an errand one night, no questions asked, when the rest of the staff had gone home. We crossed a deserted and blacked-out St Helier. His objective was the back entrance of a large grocery and greengrocery store, and my instructions were to keep out of sight in a doorway at the end of the lane and to signal the approach of any Germans, either singly or on patrol. We were soon back at Hill Street, up the stairs and into Mr Mimmack's office. He fumbled in a drawer of his desk for one of the candle stubs he kept there for lighting his pipe, balancing it carefully on the ink-stand before striking a match. Mr Mimmack sat at his desk and motioned to me to sit opposite. I could see he was loving every minute of it. He rubbed his hands together as a magician might, and then slowly withdrew an orange from the canvas bag he had brought back with him, and placed it on the desk in front of me. 'One for you' he said and, placing a second orange on his side of the desk, 'one or me'. Six times he said it, until all the oranges were displayed. They shone in the candlelight and their fragrance filled the room. They were the first oranges we had seen for four years. As I lifted an orange to my nose to smell its zest, I began 'How ...' and 'Why ...'.

Mr Mimmack put a finger to his lips, gave a long slow wink, and whispered 'auditor's perks'.

'Well' he said briskly 'I can't waste my candle'. We went downstairs, locking up as we went. Once on the street, Mr Mimmack said goodnight, raised his hat, and went his own way home. And I? To walk home to Frémont with a wonderful surprise in my bag and I, too, was going to love every minute of it.

Should anyone wish to know, the oranges were to be issued on ration, to children only. Our oranges were a few of those 'left over'.

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Excitement, such as the sharing of the oranges, didn't come every day. Every day it was my prerogative, so to speak, to provide afternoon tea. I kept a small jug for the purpose, and at a quarter to four, left the office for the Don Street Dairy. The dairy was not very far away, barely five minutes walk across the Royal Square and into King Street, almost immediately turning into Don Street. The dairy-yard was noisy, as such places usually are, with a clatter of machinery and milk cans. Some of the milk processing took place on a high platform in the yard. First I had to attract the attention of one of the men on the platform, then, if I were recognised, I would hand up the jug and it would be returned, dripping slightly. If I were not recognised, I would have to ask for a half-pint of skim for the States Auditors. The hand would come down and I passed up the begging bowl, not unlike Oliver Twist asking for more, except that I had not had any yet. It is to be remembered that until quite recently, only the very poor would have bought skim milk. It was synonymous with the workhouse, which added to the Dickensian

dimension. Today, drinking skim milk is a fashion born of an affluent society. As soon as my footstep was heard on the stairs, Mrs Keeping from the upstairs flat, who looked after the offices, would arrive with a beautifully laid tray, and at four o'clock precisely I poured the 'tea'.

\*

Barton, Mayhew & Co were the States Auditors, by which I mean the States of Jersey, and the bulk of audit work carried out in the Occupation was done in the various departments. In some departments, a running audit was carried out, notably the Treasury. When I could be spared from the office, I became an audit clerk and was on loan to work with Mr Mimmack or one of the other clerks. Inevitably, I seemed to end up at the Treasury. We worked in a room that was a semi-basement and was humorously called the dungeon, and the work could be said to be pedestrian.

It was while Mr Mimmack had absented himself that my eyes were caught by the entry on the folio facing me. The account was 'Army of Occupation' and the item read - To cushions for the yacht 'Aphrodite'.

One did not normally take notice of items in a ledger, nor was one meant to, but the words themselves 'yacht' and 'Aphrodite' were beguiling. 'Aphrodite'! Goddess of love and seduction. To the victor, the spoils ..... of course. I saw the yacht, not based in the Channel Islands and merely having a fanciful name, but riding at anchor in a splendid bay, the sea the colour of cobalt. I saw the colours of the Mediterranean, and began to actually feel a little warmer as I pursued my theme. The young men on board wore the uniforms of the Third Reich. No. There was something wrong. The men would be unclothed, or partially so, negligently at their ease, their

## CUSHIONS FOR THE YACHT 'APHRODITE'

bodies bronzed by the sun. I tried again, but even as I pictured their nakedness so the blue-grey uniforms grew on them. So even my day-dream was a disillusion. To the victor, the spoils? Was this heroic victory? The yacht had been requisitioned, in other words, stolen. The trifling cost of the cushions charged to the States of Jersey was just another contemptuous version of the 'iron heel' – and as for Aphrodite, she was a myth, wasn't she?

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## Biberach

By February 1945, my father, Ruby and Michael had been interned for two years. Life in the camp had continued in the same way. Biberach Camp had become a centre of excellence, you could almost say, surrounded with barbed wire. After the prescribed long walks in the countryside, Ruby would describe herself as 'wonderfully refreshed in spirit'; the military escort sometimes made their presence discreet. There was no lapse in the parcels of food and clothing as well as 'all manner of things' received by the internees. Ruby would write to me and say 'I wish I could send you some of the nice things we have to eat here'.

These were small comforts which in no way compensated for the fact of being a prisoner of war; and prisoners of war are expendable. No-one knows what the enemy is likely to do next. A sympathetic guard is also under orders. The discipline of the German troops was absolute, and only broke down in the Channel Islands when the troops neared a point close to starvation. After the war, Ruby said that in Biberach Camp, an order would sometimes be issued, such as 'Men aged so-and-so are to register'. These sudden orders, for however innocent a reason, must have twisted the gut with fear. Everyone had something to hide or to try to hide. Neither Ruby nor my father had ever expressed

their fears apart from this one brief mention. People generally do not talk about things they want to forget.

In the latter part of 1944, my father became ill and was transferred to the camp hospital. I had always known him to suffer periodically from what he called tummy trouble, claiming it to be a legacy of the First World War, when he had contracted enteric fever. Part of his letter, summing up the winter of 1944/45, and dated 9th February 1945 reads as follows:

‘It has been a very cold winter, as much as 40 degrees of frost, much milder now that the snow has melted. I have been in Camp hospital for two months, now in Bar. 11 a very nice room, single beds, twelve of us, all over sixty. I have been X-rayed but the trouble was not located, the usual tummy trouble. I have been on special diet for the last three months, white bread, porridge twice a day and fresh milk. I am OK Peg, a change of food and proper treatment and we will be able to go prawning at St Catherines. Keep smiling’.

Three more months to the day and the war would be over.

‘Any minute now!’ was the catchphrase of the day in Biberach Camp when Ruby wrote to me on the 23rd April, and I can best conclude with extracts from a letter from my father dated 8th May 1945:

‘On the 23rd April we were relieved by the French, after the Germans put up slight resistance close to our camp. We are free now to go out from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., which is curfew for the Germans. We have been in the town of Biberach, which is interesting and very old with a history of war in past ages. We are told by the repatriating officers who are in the camp that this is one of the best and cleanest camps they have seen. I am improving every day, and will be quite fit this August to get a few prawns. Repatriation officers are taking our

## BIBERACH

particulars but owing to such a mixed crowd here I am afraid we shall have to hang on for a bit. We went to a dance last night in the Germans' old quarters. There were a couple of English officers and about seventy French soldiers of all ranks. At 11.30 when we went to our barracks it was strange to see all the lights in camp. We used to be locked in at 10 p.m. and now we can stay out as long as we like .....

My father's words 'put up slight resistance close to our camp', though eloquent in military terms, hardly conveyed the excitement of what was, for the Germans, a debacle. An extract from Roger Harris' book *Islanders Deported* is more colourful:

'On Sunday 22nd April the internees had the satisfaction of watching the full-scale retreat of the German forces with cars, wagons, lorries, troops and the Red Cross streaming through the town while Allied planes worried them from the air, and in the background could be heard the heavy bombardment of the city of Ulm. There was great excitement and expectation in the afternoon when a column of French tanks entered Biberach, but they disappeared just as quickly again, probably on their way to cut the Ulm railway line. A night of expectancy and no sleep followed, with the curfew completely ignored until a bomb exploding nearby reminded everybody that they were not safe yet. A radio message was received from the Allied Supreme HQ that all prisoners and internees were to remain in their camps, obey their camp leaders, and wait patiently for further orders.'

Although free the internees still had another four weeks of camp life in Biberach, while all the necessary paper work was undertaken. Eventually all were cleared, and after packing their few possessions, a convoy of

## BIBERACH

French lorries arrived to take them to the American Air Force base at Mengen. Three days later RAF Dakota aircraft flew them to Hendon in England.

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## Liberation

The liberation of the Channel Islands is immediately coupled in people's minds with Mr Churchill's speech on the 8th May 1945 and, in particular, his words 'our dear Channel Islands'. They have been quoted countless times, with pictures of the Royal Square in St Helier, crowded with Islanders. I was there in the crowd, standing beneath one of the chestnut trees where loudspeakers had been hastily rigged.

The Islands had not been taken by storm, as had been prophesied by the Germans, who were under orders to mount a defence up to the very end.

The unconditional surrender of the German High Command came on the 7th May. At 10 a.m. on the 29th May, H.M.S. *Bulldog* anchored off St Helier to receive the surrender of the garrison of Jersey. Generalmajor Wulf, the *Inselkommandant* was ordered on board and duly signed the surrender document. It was all over.

History books are full of detail, but I have not written a history book. In the crowded pages of the history of the German Occupation of the Island of Jersey, I was no more than a Lowry stick figure, one among thousands, behaving well, as we were required to do.

## LIBERATION

The essence of liberation was with us long before its official arrival. We knew it just to be a matter of time and in the last months of the siege morale had been high. The Red Cross parcels with their iron rations had been a wonderful help.

Why does the last paragraph lack bite? Is it simply that to rejoice is not noteworthy, while to suffer is? Or is it always better to travel hopefully? We had arrived. The edge had been taken from our endeavour and had left a gap, an hiatus. We were, as yet, unused to freedom. The little edifices we had so painstakingly built to ensure our survival had been swept away by the rising tide of freedom, as completely as a spring tide sweeps away a sandcastle leaving no trace except in the minds of those who built it.

\*

Muss, Fay and I left Frémont in the early afternoon. We were to meet Mr Woodman in his office at the Ann Street Brewery and then walk together to the Royal Square to hear Mr Churchill's speech. Before we left his office, Mr Woodman took me to one side. 'Herr Kiel would like to have a word with you.'

Herr Kiel was the German brewer at Ann Street Brewery, where lager was brewed for the German troops. I had been vaguely aware of his existence, that he was not young, a family man, and that he was not a member of the Nazi Party.

It was one day towards the end of last summer, as we sat at lunch, that Mr Woodman said 'Kiel was in his office today, crying, his head in his hands. His family has been wiped out in a bombing raid'. He let his statement rest, and as there could be no answer, the seconds of awkward sadness were covered up by a small clatter of

## LIBERATION

plates being passed and spoons and forks being taken up, before we continued with the meal.

Now Herr Kiel wished to speak with me.

Away from the office, the warm smell of the brewery took over. Its operation was suspended on this day of public holiday, and the emptiness of the yard was almost palpable, accentuated by the incessant chirping of sparrows up in the roof. Herr Kiel came forward to meet me. He held out his hand and I took it, then slowly and carefully, he said 'Now that the War is over, I hope your parents will come back safe and sound' ..... Herr Kiel ..... wishing me well, a quiet greying man who had lost everything, his wife, his children and his house, in the raid on Cologne.

It was a funny old world long before Margaret Thatcher said it, more than that, it was incomprehensible.

I rejoined Mr and Mrs Woodman and Fay and we moved towards the centre of St Helier and the Royal Square, to listen to the speeches and to watch the symbolic raising of the flags.

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## Reunion

The War was over and it was time to pick up the threads of our lives again. But not at the exact place where they had been put down. The warp had been twisted more than a little.

The War had provided a watershed, dividing the old ways and the new. In the Channel Islands, the old days and their leisurely pace had gone forever. In ten years' time, I might not be walking down to St Helier harbour to meet the mailboat, but would just as likely be driving to the airport to meet an incoming flight. Even so, there is still a particular sense of warm anticipation in meeting someone arriving by sea, despite the fact that passenger boats are now designed as car carriers and reduced in people's estimation to one name only – the ferry.

I had left the town and arrived at the steps leading to the raised section running the length of the Albert Pier, known as the 'walks' or promenade. The promenade was defined on one side by the sea wall, and on the other by stout railings broken at intervals by flights of granite steps leading down to the harbour proper. Seaward to the west lay St Aubin's Bay, dominated by Elizabeth Castle. The sea today looked very blue, with sunlight glancing off the water in glittering spangles enough to dazzle the eyes.

## REUNION

My father and Ruby were coming home. Michael had chosen to remain in England.

My emotions were high, with a tightening of the throat and tears not far away, and I wondered if I would be able to restrain them at our reunion. I had reached the end of the walks. The mailboat was not yet in sight. It was just a matter of a little waiting now.

The news was that the mailboat was delayed, and would be at least two hours late.

It is curious how two hours' waiting changed my overwrought state into one of calm and pleasant expectation. It follows that with two further hours of waiting I should be reproaching Ruby and my father for their tardiness. But no, my feelings remained the same; it was only the immediacy of the moment that had been lost.

I leaned on the railings, feeling them warm against my bare arms, enjoying the familiar scene. I had been one of a group of children once, hanging on these same railings, watching the boats loading and unloading. The harbour was our playground. Here I was again, leaning on the railings, idling, idling the afternoon away.

The road below was quiet, but would soon be busy when the mailboat came into sight. A crane stood still on its track; some small craft moved down the middle of the harbour; the pilot boat stood by. And the herring gulls were all around, in a row along the landtie or fighting for scraps in the water, the gull with the prize soaring upwards and being beset by the others, squawking madly.

Just across the road lay the empty berth.

At last, the Isle of Guernsey rounded Noirmont Point. She came steadily across the bay, standing off as she approached Elizabeth Castle, and then making a sharp turn and reducing speed as she neared the pierheads, the pilot boat out to meet her.

## REUNION

Ruby said afterwards that she saw me standing on the walks and my hair shone golden in the sun. She, obviously, had not been cooling her heels.

The Isle of Guernsey had seen service throughout the war and was still in camouflage livery. She would be refitted and, before too long, become once again the trim mail and passenger steamer I had remembered, plying between the Channel Islands and the Mainland.

I watched the Isle of Guernsey come alongside, with ropes flung ashore to help secure her fore and aft. Fenders fell into the water with a splash. There was a sudden burst of activity as gangways were manhandled into position, and shortly afterwards the first passengers began to disembark.

My father came first, followed by Ruby. When he stepped ashore, we stood for a few seconds, he and I, looking at each other, and I think he was pleased when I just said, 'Hello, Dad'.

The End

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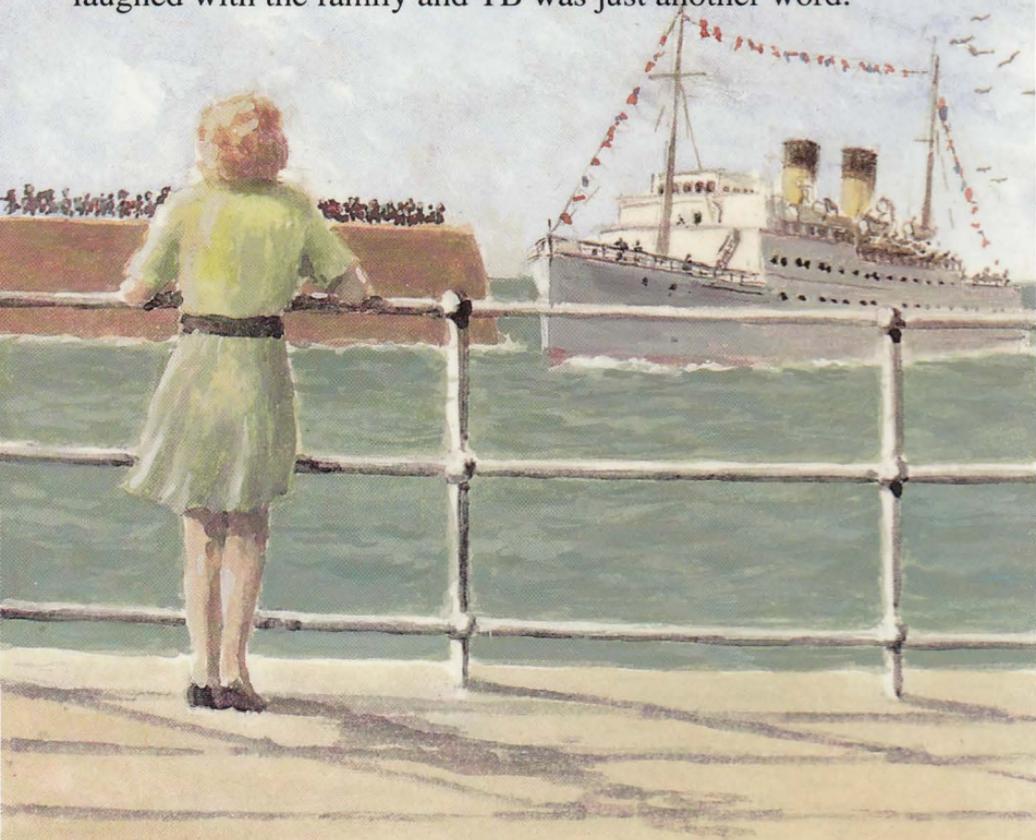
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“The viewing was over, the Germans had left. A black comedy had been played out in less than twenty minutes. In fact, the Germans had not simply left but, according to Muss, had been out of the house like a shot.

Nothing more was ever heard of the house being taken over, nor was the prospect anticipated. There was an acquired resilience to such incidents in those days.

And I? I was unruffled in my contentment. I, too, had laughed with the family and TB was just another word.”



AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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