

KISMET.

CUTTING FROM A NEWSPAPER.

Dumped down in the middle of "Nowhere," lonely Australian, badly needs cheering. What offers?

Write, "Austro," 9th Inf. Bn., A.I.F.
HER LETTER.

By NICHOLAS FEDOROVICH, late Corporal 9th Btn., A.I.F.

"Lonely Soldier Boy in the Trenches.—I am writing this with my eyes very tightly shut, just the teeniest little glimmer of light gleaming thro' to show which way the writing should go, because I am frightened at my own darning. Just think of it, writing to a Man I have never seen—Man with a capital "M" because he is very, very important just now, isn't he? I am wondering what grandma would say were she here in this topsy-turvy world today. Dear stately crinolined dame of old-fashioned days, who would have fainted to see a man in his shirt sleeves—how horrified you would be at the modern girl with her slang, her wounded "Tom-mies," and her—oh! all the rest of it. ...What am I to talk to you about, oh soldier in the land of "Nowhere"—the war? Why, I guess you have enough to and to spare of that. Myself? Pough!

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But that is very uninteresting—by the time you have waded thro' half the letters you receive you will be so mixed up with black hair and brown hair that you won't know whether the sky is blue or just nothing at all. I wonder if you realise what you are letting yourself in for.

Well, you soon will, and that you survive is the sincere wish of yours very sincerely,
Esme Stuart.

P.S.—If you want to write, my hair and eyes are from "No Man's" and we don't deal in personalities, just letters.—
E.S.

HIS LETTER.

Dear Blessed Woman in England,—I am not going to make any apologies, I am saluting the postscript in that cheery little epistle of yours. The humourist of our dug-out, who is responsible for that advertisement, is seated at the festive board tearing his hair at the array of many hued scented letters in front of him. We are all watching him with malicious satisfaction, and exact to carry him off the field in a few moments. Good luck to the modern girl may she

carry him off the field in a few moments.

Good luck to the modern girl may she live long to enjoy herself. Give me the woman who can be a pal to a man, and you have the straightest, truest creation God ever made. We have just come from the liveliest dust-up that ever gave a zest to life, and I am disgustingly dirty. Oh for the luxury of a bath and a change!

Cheero! little girl in the Motherland.
—Sincerely yours,
Roy Graeme.

P.S.—I feel sure we are going to be "pals." Here's luck to our friendship.—
Roy.

HER LETTER.

"Dear Soldier Chum,"—What frauds pens are. Here I have been chewing the handle of mine for—it seems like ages—waiting for inspiration, and it hasn't helped me the tiniest bit in the world. The page in front of me is just as blank as that "pink grey matter" that is commonly called by courtesy a brain.

Oh dear? Why didn't you give me something to answer in your letter? And yet . . . I am rather glad you didn't ask questions, as it is so much easier to avoid trespassing, and there are always barriers.

Still in each heart of hearts, a hidden deep

Lies, never fathomed by its dearest—
best.

Poor humourist! Curiosity is as much a man's folly as a woman's—yet . . . since his folly has given me you I sympathise with him. . . . You may tell him so.

I like your definition of the word "pal," it brings the vision of clean wind-swept places and lofty peaks. Unhappily, convention steps in and bars the way. Can you imagine a conventional God? How he must smile at our pitiful subterfuges.

I am getting too serious . . . somehow it is easy to write to you, perhaps because we are merely "ships that pass in the night." Good luck, my chum.—
From yours, Esme.

HIS LETTER.

Little Pal in Homeland,—I wonder if you realise what your letters mean to me out here—possibly not.

A star shines on, and knows not it is still a sear,

To guide men's lives, and show them what they are.

To us Australians a letter from the Motherland is a mighty big thing. Dear old England, the land of our birth! The thought of her white cliffs and her green

old England, the land of our birth! The thought of her white cliffs and her green fields tug at our heart strings. Sentiment, you know, plays a somewhat big part in our lives out there, and we are not ashamed to own it, but . . . the sentiment of the field of battle goes pretty deep.

Civilisation never yet touched the bed-rock of truth, but the primitive men of trench life, face to face with the big issue of war as it really is, the man who has learnt to front death with a smile on his lips, has found the keynote of the universe, and has come to a sure knowledge of the only things that are worth counting.

Forgive me if I have bored you; it is a relief sometimes to put one's thoughts into words, however crude they may be. If you do not feel inclined to read the 'vapourings' of a mere man, please cut me short.

Just a warning, little pal; you mustn't talk about being "ships that pass in the night"—chums are never that; please believe that you are privileged to ask any questions you like—I do not erect barriers, so you need not worry about "treading on my corns."

Convention makes a bad third, so we are ruling him—or shouldn't it be her—out of our friendship. She can stand and sulk in the corner if she likes, while we laugh at her. What fun!

It isn't always easy to express one's feelings, but the God I worship is the one that rules the great white spaces, the mighty ocean, the towering heights, whose illimitable love just lightly touches each troubled soul with peace. Badly expressed thoughts—but I believe you will understand.—All my thoughts, always your pal, Roy.

HER LETTER.

"Chum of Mine,"—I am afraid this letter is going to be about the most "ditch-watery" thing any one could ever imagine—even the thought of you fails to dispel the black mood that is upon me. It isn't fair to worry you with my troubles, so I am making this brief. Somehow or other there is an indefinable feeling in the atmosphere that something is going to happen. I am convinced that it is going to be horrid, and, try as I will, I cannot shake off the dread that encompasses me. It seems as tho' I were caged in, and with all my struggling I cannot break thro' the bars.

A motto I once read comes to my mind:

"Two men looked out from prison bars,
The one saw mud, the other stars."

To-night I can only see mud!

Forgive me, Roy: I have no right to depress you like this.—Penitently yours,
Esme.

P.S.—I don't know if the accompanying "goodies" will help you "some"—I hope so.

HIS LETTER.

"Woman of my Dreams,"—Are you a witch, I wonder! I hardly know what to say to you—your delightful parcel was such a surprise.

Yesterday was my 30th birthday, and the first thing I saw was dear old "postie," his ever beaming face shining like the full moon, holding out your parcel. Jove! I wish you could have been present at the feast—they all toasted you in fine style, and the humourist is composing a sonnet on your perfection. For myself . . . little girl, may I tell you what is in my heart. I have tried to stifle it, but it cannot be denied . . . it is something bigger than myself.

As I write, the first faint flush of dawn is tinting the skies with palest pink—the glimmering stars pale and fade away in the coming splendour of morn; far away one can just faintly hear the distant thunder of guns. God is very near in the shell-swept silent places of Flanders, and under the quiet stars a man may learn much of himself and his Maker. The promise of the morning wakens new thoughts and hopes, and stirs the soul of man afresh with the mystery and all the wonder of life and death.

If I pass over your letter, "Little Pal," forgive me. I only know too well the deadlock that life comes to sometimes, only it isn't fair for a woman to experience it; her life should be joyous and happy, untrammelled with the cares of man's sordid money-making world.

Dream woman of mine, subconsciously, I have been seeking you all my life; now that I have found you I cannot bear to think of you as unhappy. Let me help you to find the stars . . . together we will make our world of paradise. God bless you, dear.
Roy.

HER LETTER.

"Boy Dear,"—What can I say to you? Life has never seemed a more complex tangle than now.

As I hold your dear letter in my hand I wish . . . Oh boy! Why have you spoilt the sweetest friendship life has ever

spoil the sweetest friendship life has ever offered me? A moment ago I walked across to the glass and surveyed myself—must I draw a picture of what I saw there. Must I tell you of the lines that constant fight for livelihood has drawn upon my face—the disillusionment that has shadowed and dulled the brightness of my eyes, the cynicism that lurks in the drooping corners of my mouth.

Dearest boy I know, a woman cannot have fought the world for 35 years without the marks of the struggle showing. She cannot touch pitch and not be defiled—the undercurrent of trickery and deceit is bound to tarnish the sweet, clear, unswerving torch of honesty lighted in her soul; it sweeps her along in its train, and flings her high on the rocks of flippancy and heartbreak.

Boy dear, if I do not accept what you offer it is because I dare not; it is not fair to you in your youth—forgive me, dearest boy in the world—I cannot write more now.

Esme.

The woman paused a moment by the window, and glanced out into the deepening twilight. A thick mist was rising across the river, shaping itself into fantastic forms, that seemed to bend and swirl in ghastly resemblances of human figures. She shivered slightly as she dropped the heavy curtains, and, turning away with a stifled sigh seated herself at her writing table. Half unconsciously she raised her eyes to the photograph of a soldier that stood in the place of honour, and a little tender smile curved the corners of the drooping mouth. The boyish eyes seemed to glance out of the picture with a mute question in their depths, and she caught her breath sharply. "Boy," she whispered . . . and dropped her head in her hands.

The sound of a shuffling footstep and a knock at the door aroused her, and she swung round sharply as the tawny head of her landlady peered in at the door, staring with undisguised curiosity at the letter held in her grimy hand.

"From the Front, miss," she volunteered with easy familiarity.

"Thank you," and Esme took the letter quickly. Her face whitened suddenly at the unknown writing on the envelope.

"That will do," she said steadily.

As the woman still lingered at the door,

there was a silence in the room as she stood there, holding the letter in her hands that trembled ever so slightly. Then she broke the seal.

"Dear Miss Stuart,"—It is with great

sorrow and deep sympathy that I have to inform you of the death of Captain Grimes. His last wish before he went into action was that I should write you should anything happen to him, and he passed into my safe keeping the enclosed letter. You will be glad to know he was killed instantaneously.

With deep regrets of the sad news I have to convey to you.—I remain, yours sincerely,

Anthony Lester (Colonel).

There was not a vestige of colour in Esme's face as she quietly opened the flap of the enclosure.

"Beloved Mine." The firm, clear handwriting blurred suddenly, but with an effort she forced back the tears, and nerved herself to read steadily on. "Do you think it possible for me to accept the decision expressed in your last letter? Oh, you dear woman! What do years matter. It is yourself I want, the sweet, clean soul of understanding you—my dream: woman come true.

We are on the eve of a big charge. If I come thro'—but of course I shall—then oh, wondrous news! Ten days' leave and . . . you! Already I can see the vision of an ivy covered cottage—and as I stand with my hand on the gate I see you advance to greet me. I am going to kiss away all the tired lines from your face, all the watery disillusionment, and the . . .

The order has just come thro' to charge. If I am able I will finish this letter—if not, then farewell, heart of my heart!

The ticking of the clock seemed incredibly loud as Esme raised her eyes with a dazed look in them. Once more she sought the pictured ones of the man in the photograph. They seemed to smile at her; and with a little sob she knelt down, holding out her hands as tho' to gather in all the happiness that fate had seen fit to deny her. The shadows lengthened and deepened in the room as she knelt. And from outside came the shrill voice of a newsboy:—

"Extra Special! Glorious charge of the Australians. Last stand of the 9th Light Infantry, A.I.F."