

May 30, 1940

Dear Momma,

Last night I dreamt that you had taken me to the Bon Marché dep't store and bought Kitchenware. Sieves and pots and coffee machines and saucepan lids. I loved everything except the pots, and I told you my pot-place was already bursting with them. So you took back the pots and exchanged them for geranium seeds. Anyway, thank you for everything!

You see how domestic I am! How have the mighty fallen!

Life is so queer. It's complicated enough in any case, but war is the final blow. You can't eat meat three days a week, you can't bathe *except* three days a week, you can't buy sugar except in clandestine ways, bread is limited, newspapers are one page each except Saturdays and Sundays, when they have two sheets apiece, you can't plan so far as a week ahead, God only knows what the score will be by then. And these are the easy burdens. Taxes! They are easier than bombs to bear, or losing your home in a night, and all you own. They are all easy enough to think about from far off, but they happen to people so often, and they are awful in close-up. All talk of guilt aside, this sort of thing shouldn't come to pass.

But the most horrible thing is the way the hate is spreading, people hating other people who are just as much in the toils of circumstance as they themselves.

There is one class of people *I* am coming to want to exterminate: old women. They are the most bloodthirsty, belligerent, super-patriotic heroes under the sun, railing against everyone capable of doing so who doesn't go out & fight. Why doesn't America come over & help? Why don't young men volunteer? Why aren't all Germans put to death here and now? Unfortunately, all old women seem to be that way. Old men are somewhat like them, but not so bad. The younger they are, the nearer military age, the saner they become. It's a tragic repetition of that scene in the *Pirates of Penzance*¹, where the women urge the men to go "On ye heroes, forth to glory!"² while the men take a more realistic view of the situation, and cringe. Revolting, and one is forced to listen to the old vultures day in and day out. How different is the attitude of young Norwegian, Belgian, Dutch, White Russians, etc., who are being "called up" these days. Young

¹ "*The Pirates of Penzance*; or, *The Slave of Duty* is a comic opera in two acts, with music by Arthur Sullivan and libretto by W. S. Gilbert. The opera's official premiere was at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City on 31 December 1879..." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pirates_of_Penzance, accessed 2016-11-02)

² *Pirates of Penzance*, No. 17. Chorus (with solos)

Mabel. Go, ye heroes, go to glory,
Though you die in combat gory,
Ye shall live in song and story.
Go to immortality!
Go to death, and go to slaughter;
Die, and every Cornish daughter
With her tears your grave shall water.
Go, ye heroes, go and die!

Girls. Go, ye heroes, go and die!
Go, ye heroes, go and die!

Sergeant. Such expressions don't appear,
Sergeant. Calculated men to cheer,
Sergeant. Who are going to meet their fate
In a highly nervous state.

Police. Tarantara! tarantara!
Police. Tarantara!



Americans over *here* feel the way those poor fellows do, and if they don't in the U.S. they are damned fools. *Dulce et decorum est pro Morgan mori*,³ if you're not doing the dying.

That subject is beginning to make us morbid.

What happened to Gamelin,⁴ and why do the French think Leopold was king of the French, and not the Belgians, these are the questions going round.

Ah, well.

Momma, here is an appeal from me to *you*. I led poppa on to send me a jar of Covermark by telling him it would last for months. Well, I meant the real *jar*, such as we always used to buy,

shaped like this , tall and cylindrical, at \$3.00 or so. Unfortunately, the girl he bought it from sent him a pot, shaped like this  of Waterproof Covermark. It is much smaller, contains less, and *doesn't* last for months. Now I'm in a fix, because I'll soon have used it all up, and I hate to make poppa send a third package. I hate to ask *you* to send one, heaven knows, but you know how my life depends on it. If I could send over myself I would but you can't send francs out, and I only have that one dollar bill you sent me long ago (kept in my passport for emergencies). They have the stuff at Bambergers, or Lydia O'Learys, 551 Fifth Avenue, they will probably wrap it up & send it for you. The color I want is still *Tan medium*, and you have to say "Tan-medium" rather than just "tan" or just "medium". I wish I didn't need it, but I *do*, and a big jar really *would* last for months, I insist. *Not* the Coverstik, *not* the small pot or jar of Waterproof Covermark, but the *big jar of Covermark* as we first bought it, at \$3.00 or so, in Tan-medium.

All I ever do is gripe or want something, it seems.

We still don't know what I should do, stay here or go. Everyone says the whole southwest France is crowded to overflowing, with no beds in Bordeaux, Biarritz, St. Jean de Luz, etc. to be had. If I could get to Spain & come back (especially the latter) I could go to some border town there such as San Sebastian, & get plenty of accommodation, but it would be well nigh impossible to come back into France afterwards. What a mess.

Love to you & Jimmyboy,

Me.

³ *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*: "What joy, for fatherland to die" (a line from the Roman lyrical poet Horace's *Odes*, translated by John Conington; from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dulce_et_decorum_est_pro_patria_mori, accessed 2016-11-02). The reason for the change to "Morgan" is unclear.

⁴ "Maurice Gustave **Gamelin** (20 September 1872 – 18 April 1958) was a senior French Army officer. Gamelin is remembered for his unsuccessful command (until 17 May 1940) of the French military during the Battle of France (10 May–22 June 1940) in the Second World War and his steadfast defense of republican values." ... "During the Vichy regime, Gamelin was arrested and unsuccessfully tried for treason along with other important political and military figures of the Third Republic ... during the Riom Trial. At this trial, Gamelin refused to answer the charges against him, instead maintaining a dignified silence. Imprisoned by the Vichy regime in Fort du Portalet in the Pyrenees, he was later deported by the Germans to the Itter Castle in North Tyrol with a few other French high officials. He was freed from the castle after the Battle for Castle Itter. After the war, he published his memoirs, titled *Servir....* Gamelin died in Paris in April 1958 at the age of 85." (From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Gamelin, accessed 2016-11-02.)

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Mo.