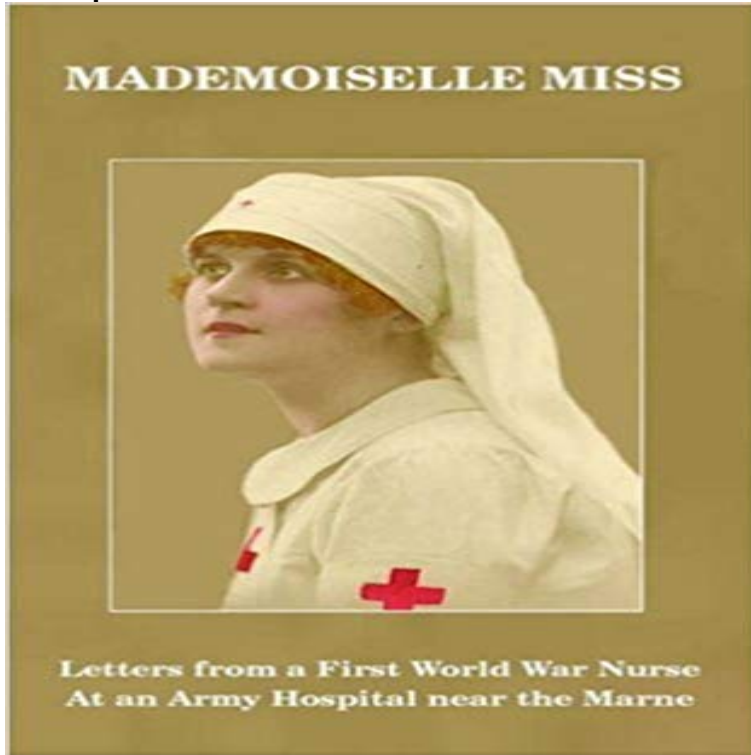


Mademoiselle Miss: Letters from a First World War Nurse at an Army Hospital Near the Marne



Letters from an American girl who served with the rank of lieutenant, at a French army hospital near the trenches of the Marne. She was known as Mademoiselle Miss and la petite mere and she lovingly described her patients as her children. She says: At Verdun three hundred men came in one night, in such a condition as beggars description... Weve never had such a rush as this, and the Ambulance was quite demoralized. Usually the rough filth of the trenches is removed in the depouillage, but on that night there was no time for such daintiness, and the soldiers were dumped right into their beds with all manner of blood and mud caked to their shivering bodies. Imagine my despair over my clean sheets, so hard to come by! But such despair was too trivial, beside the horrors one was powerless to cope with. Here on the front it isnt just a mere nurse that is required; send the finest, most versatile woman that America or any other country can produce. To be ideally adapted to the post she should combine a glacial calm with the unfailing gayety of springtime, and a sense of humor always; she should possess the powers of construction and invention, a touch as light as a watchmakers, and strength to carry a man alone. Combining tremendous initiative with excessive caution, firmness with tenderness, and authority with courtesy, and fearlessness with awe, she ought to be a psychologist, and deeply learned in the profession, and ready to read the riot act . You would sicken with fright if you saw the operations that a nurse is called upon to performthe putting in of drains, washing wounds so huge and ghastly as to make one marvel at the soldiers endurance, the digging about for bits of shrapnel. We discharge our patients as fast as we can, and bury dozens a week. It is all like a weird dream, laughter and blood and death and funny episodes, and sublime also, all under the autumn stars. When my little

patient, No. 23, flung out his arms last night (he knew he was going) and said, Goodbye, oh, my sister, my sister! Kiss me! it took control to finish giving the last of my anti-tetanus injections a few minutes later. (I have one large needle for my whole Pavilion, and am obliged to give on an average of fifteen injections a day with it and as if that were not enough, the doctor frequently asks to borrow it for another hospital....)

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