

## HOMeward BOUND

(Inspired by the story of Robert Graves)

Tuesday 1 August 1916.

Dearest Mother,

No doubt you will be receiving this letter after delivery of correspondence from Colonel Crawshaw advising you that I have died of wounds. I can only confirm with absolute assurance that I have survived the nightmare and that I now lay in Queen Alexandra's Hospital at Highgate. Well, I say hospital, I actually lay in Sir Alfred Mond's house surrounded by his art collection and ostentatiousness. You'll remember Sir Alfred – he is, like us, of German descent, and has not gone unnoticed by the authorities for allegedly possessing some Germanic sympathies. Sir Alfred is, to my mind, a British patriot through and through and without question. Sadly, I doubt history will record this.

I was unlucky and fell to heading toward death following a German shell landing less than a few paces from where I stood in High Wood in Bois de Fourneaux. I believe a comrade close to me was not so fortunate. I awoke at a disused enemy dressing-station and then transferred to a Field Hospital. From there, I was transferred to Rouen Hospital and unknown to me, given the last rites. I should not have survived the night.

I understand that His Majesty was informed of my walk to St Peter's gateway, and even *The Times* printed an obituary! How positively prompt of them.

I must say that my homecoming and arrival at Waterloo was warm and welcoming, and not without hysteria. The crowds meeting the troops on leave, the wounded, and the dead, were just like I remember when we all went off to war. Flag waving and singing songs. It's as though people at home believe the Battle of the Somme to be marking some sort of end-stage of this bloody war. No such event dear Mother. The fighting goes on. It is as intense as ever and both the enemy and us are losing great gallant men by the hundreds. The attrition demanded by our Generals in the field, is an order that must surely be tried in law and those same Generals found accountable.

As for my comrades left behind on those fields of France, pushed out across a Western Front that runs for more than 400 miles, I can only pray they return and that this war is brought to an end by those same politicians that failed to continue to speak with each other.

My war is over. But I will not stop at making my views and feelings known. No doubt I shall be accused of treason, like Sassoon, however there cannot be anything denied. This must, in the end, be the war to end all wars.

I hear Sassoon has written a lament entitled *To His Dead Body*. How grateful I am to have such a friend. I guess he is putting me central in the situation of war's hell and then transporting me to the Lord's Garden. I could almost write his words but please do not let on.

I now must write the Editor of *The Times*. And I must inform my beloved wife and her family. Will they mellow toward me now, having served? I cannot be sure. Please send some new clothes, some coffee, and some chocolate. Wishes to father.

Robert.