1.

We walked together..quietly, gently, holding finger tips.

Glided, past nods of approval.

A society wedding, Mummy was pleased,

Daddy was proud, a young Major in his own Company, with prospects.

A suitable match.

I was comfortable. Life was perfect, in the cold, crisp winter.

The fire warmed our booted toes, as we read, after tea.

Alice brought in pikelets, toasted and perfectly spread, with butter, that never misbehaved.

She caught my eye…. I couldn’t read the look…

We slipped between covers in the darkness, between bright, white unstained, sheets.

You were away on manoeuvres, training, preparing….away a lot.

I lost count of the nights I was alone, dreaming.

Then came the heat of the long, dazzling summer, the summer of anticipation.

My eyes were tearful as the bright light hit me a glancing blow off my pure, white dress.

You came home sometimes, smelling of boot polish and leather, metal cleaner and cordite….and something else…a mysterious scent.

Was it a soldiers fear, caused by the preparation for the conflict to come..or something unknown to me…who can I ask?

I wish I knew more, understood more, about life and men, love and passion. Alice would know, please tell me, explain…

Alice, with her knowing eyes, egging me on, nudging me on…go on

Ma’am …go on….

I wish I knew more,

I want to know, I can take it…

And then you were gone – left town on a train, with your men, to the front.

I’ll wave with my white hankie.

I’ll send letters with a lock of hair.

At Christmas, it’ll all be over, you’ll be home, we’ll be together, round the fire. It’ll warm our bare toes, we’ll make promises again.

2.

I wish I could write a love letter

- a message in a bottle.

-to you.

I wish I could send a lock of hair

- a keepsake

- for my lover.

We smothered one another in the heat of summer.

Before the blood and mud of this foreign field.

I shared you with another

-she promised

-in sickness and in health.

My promises were secret messages.

And so, I followed you,

-my love,

-to the front line.

In my pure white uniform,

-like an angel.

And every morning, I searched the lists,

-of boys

-brought in, through the night on the cattle train.

I washed their faces,

-gently,

-hoping that beneath the flesh and clay,

-it might be you.

I’m here for you,

- I’ll care for you.

I’ll mend the gouge in your cheek that… blushed,

guiltily,

I’ll mend the hole where your lips… smiled,

secretly,

I’ll mend the caverns where your eyes… winked,

knowingly.

I’ll comb your hair, parted by the bullet, that had your name on.

I’ll pick out the lice from your private places, we

shared.

I’ll bathe the shards of bone and flesh, that

ran to me.

I’ll care for you…tomorrow…when you come,

destroyed,

I’ll care for you.

3.

I’ll do my bit…my country needs me.

I’ll wear a white, nurses’ uniform and volunteer in the large, country house, where mutilated boys come to be mended.

One day I read the list…no..no..no…not your name?

No, no, too young, too loved.

I search for you and find your bed with a raised mound, un-moving and still, quiet and still.

I take your hand, my dearest one, your lips part and gently whisper,

“Alice.”