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The NURSE'S STORY



BY ADELE BLENEAU

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One afternoon, immediately after lunch, Dr. Souchou asked me to be ready in ten minutes for a rather long ride. In fact, he said: "I have just received a message asking us to go fifty kilometers away and bring in the wounded that the raiding ulians have left behind. We will go with Lieutenant F., as we may have to pass close to the German lines and so need a cool, firm hand at the wheel. With the lieutenant driving," he said, laughing, "it will take a very superior marksman to hit us."

I was delighted that I had, on account of speaking German, been chosen as the one nurse to go, and we were off in ten minutes.

Our way lay through numerous French outposts, where we were sometimes held up until a higher officer gave us the right of way. We passed many bombarded villages, to some of which the poor dwellers had returned in their ruins. But one, a place that once must have meant home to 10,000 or 12,000, was in such a state of devastation that no one had returned save two nuns. They had returned save the altar might not be desecrated. At one place there had been a large factory. What was left of the machinery proved it to have been powerful and modern, but even Lieutenant F., who was an engineer, could not decide what had been manufactured, the ruin was so complete. Only one house in the whole place was left standing. On its door was written in German, "Do not burn or pillage this house," and signed and sealed by one Captain Reuss. It was empty.

We wondered a good deal what special consideration had prompted the captain to bestow his august protection to this insignificant dwelling.

And then we were halted and told we could not go farther in that direction. We must retrace our way and make a detour of thirty kilometers; the Germans were shelling a French outpost but a little way on. We did as we were directed, but in some way took a route that led us to the very spot we had tried to avoid. The sound of the guns came nearer and nearer, but we momentarily expected our road would turn suddenly and sharply away. And, too, the firing had ceased during the last fifteen minutes, and, speeding as we were, we had gone far in that time. On coming to the top of a hill we were thunderstruck to see, less than half a mile away, a long line of British soldiers filing at double quick across a pontoon bridge. As if timing our arrival to a second, the firing began anew. The British line paused a moment, and we heard an indistinct command. We could plainly see the men getting ready for their sprint under fire, with a space of twenty feet between each. Then came the dash. I grew fatigued as I saw many of them fall into the river below. Once over the bridge, they raced up the hill, and far away on its crest we saw the Germans begin their advance. The English fell flat on their stomachs and began firing. They worked their guns so quickly that Dr. Souchou said they must be hot in their hands. The Germans came with a rush. I sat there petrified. It seemed as if I could not endure the sight, when all at once the doctor said in a voice he tried to make calm, "What do you make out over there?" pointing to a spot on the horizon.

The sun came out brilliantly for a second, and we saw plainly a detachment of French cavalry. At the same moment a French aeroplane swept into view, and there was a glitter as of tinsel waved in the sun. It was an artillery signal for range, and an instant later we heard the peculiar bark of the French 75. The Germans had heard it too. They began falling back. The doctor said quietly, "I think we had better go."

The road was empty of troops, so we made up for lost time. Half an hour later we found the piece for which we had been searching. It was a large country house standing in a little clump of trees. The door was open. On the polished floor were scattered a deck of cards, half a dozen empty champagne bottles and even a few filled ones. A table was overturned; cigars and cigarette ends were all over the place. A tapestry chair lay upside down with its back broken and hanging by the cloth. A china cabinet had evidently been smashed with a chair. Knives, forks and plates were lying in confusion, with half eaten food scattered everywhere.

Loft and destruction had gone hand in hand. What couldn't be taken must be destroyed.

CHAPTER VI. Hinges of Destiny.

ALL day they had been bringing men in from the front, wounded, dirty and dying; all day I had smelled that peculiar, indescribable odor which I had learned so well to know in these last few weeks and which an eternity will not serve to efface from my memory.

Many of the men, although terribly wounded, had been so exhausted that to awaken them was impossible. We had not tried; we had let them sleep.

A wound that has been without care for a few hours can go on for two hours longer without attention. For nothing that man has invented or science discovered can take the place of sleep. There had been hundreds brought in during the last twenty-four hours, and one by one they had been washed, their wounds dressed and then put to bed.

I was so tired that I dumbly wondered whether I should succumb, as the men from the front had, to overmastering sleep when we—the orderly and I—came to the last man. We were surprised to find he was an Englishman. We had started to undress him when he roused up and said:

"Where is my captain? They have left him—I know they have left him. They thought he was dead or dying, and they have left him out in the cold and the dark. Do not touch me. I am going to find him." And before we could stop him he had jumped up, struggled to his feet and was halfway down the ward. We were after him like a flash and in a moment had overtaken him, but our combined efforts did not serve to stop him, and before we realized what was happening he had dragged us to the outside door. Suddenly a door opposite opened, and Colonel S. stood silhouetted against the light.

"What is it, my man? Something in his calm, cool manner implied authority, and this is the story the soldier vehemently poured forth:

"I am a lieutenant in the 5th Sikh regiment. This morning at 3 o'clock we were awakened by a night attack. An incessant artillery fire began, and shells came thick on top of one another. First they were quite close to us, then next to us, then upon us, and with that there came that hideous stinging sound of the bullets. Short red flames burst out. The searchlight threw its terrible pale gleam across the horizon, and the screaming shrapnel fell like hail on the ground around us. Everywhere was the ceaseless crack of the rifle, the bursting of shells and the roar of high explosives. Far away somewhere up the line came the clatter of the machine guns getting into action. My God! Our Indians fought like devils, but we were surrounded. Those who were able jumped to the parapet and fought on until the end. The last thing I remember during the bayonet charge that followed was hearing a German officer call out to my captain, 'Englishmen, surrender! Seizing a rifle to encourage his men, I heard above the din of battle his cool reply, 'Surrender, be d—!' As he said this he fell. I reached out to catch him, and then I knew no more until I found myself here. Now I must go back there to find him. I know just where he is. It cannot be far."

I thought, as he was talking, it must have been just the moment that French cavalry appeared on the crest of the hill and the Germans fell back, otherwise he and his beloved captain would be lying on the battlefield in the enemy's lines or, by mere good luck, in the enemy's hospital. The boy was not badly wounded, and the doctor decided to let him go out with the bandage and search for his captain.

It was a moonlight night, and as this young subaltern, accompanied by the surgeon, went down the gravelled walk through the garden I followed them. The last I saw of him was as he swung himself into a waiting motor with several of the stretcher bearers and was off toward the battlefield, where they had fought so desperately only a few hours before.

I felt wildly excited. Something of that strange thrill, terrible and tragic, that had been ever present within me when I had first begun nursing and that had vanished through the curse or the blessing of getting used to things again seized me. There is something within us, and stronger than our will, which adapts us to every change of circumstance so quickly that we sometimes resent the adaptation. I had found that one cannot continue to be surprised or glad or even sorry above a certain level. War is like loud and sensational music, the effects of which thrill an audience only about three minutes. I had grown to believe that I had seen so much of the hideous and ghastly that comes into every nurse's life at a receiving hospital that my capacity for great excitement had been exhausted. But out there alone under the calm bright moon, the air heavy with perfume of garden flowers, something of it all stirred and quickened my heart to its very depths. I forgot that my limbs ached with fatigue, forgot how ardently I had been longing for bed, and stood there wistfully gazing down the road, as if expecting some dear one.

I do not know how long I stood there, but I suddenly became conscious of a fast approaching motor. In a second it was at the gate, and I heard a voice that sounded strangely familiar. It was the little lieutenant, supporting in his arms his captain. I remember dimly thinking that war revived one's faith again in miracles.

"Quick, nurse!" he said to me. "I won't believe he is dead, although I can't find any pulse."

He was carried into the hospital and immediately into the outer room of the operating theater, where the strong lights were switched on. For a moment I was dazzled, half blinded by their brilliancy, and it was only after I had unbuttoned his uniform and bared his breast, that all might and compassed of that Dr. Souchou generally gave, that as I leaned over him, I recognized the white and finely chiseled face of Captain Fraser, the Englishman who had helped me rescue the Austrian officer that night on the Lasi-tania.

The doctor's quick and businesslike voice brought me abruptly back to earth.

"A serious abdominal wound with internal hemorrhage," he was saying as he made a hasty examination. "This is the kind of case," he continued, "about which one might say the person must have a mission to fulfill, as by all the laws of nature this man ought to have been dead hours ago."

In the confusion of the moment we had all forgotten the indomitable courage of the boyish lieutenant, and it was only when we heard a third and something fall limply to the floor that we remembered him. He had fainted. An orderly and a doctor picked him up and carried him out, while I remained to help Dr. Souchou with the operation.

"He is so nearly done for, nurse," the doctor said, "I think we had better try the new anaesthetic, scopolamine, if you feel sure of yourself in giving it."

"I won't fall you, doctor," I answered. Father had used it for nearly a year before his death, and I had often given it for him.

During the next hour, as the doctor performed the intricate operation with the utmost skill, I worked with no thought of weariness and with a prayer on my lips for the patient. When it was all over the doctor turned to his assistant and said:

"Sew him up. I will see him in the morning. I do not mind telling you I am pretty much all in, but I think we have made a good job of it, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if he pulls through." Then glancing back and speaking to me as he passed through the door he said, "You'd better look at his pulse and see who that chap is."

"He is Captain Fraser," I said.

"Captain Fraser? Of what regiment?" he asked.

"I do not know that," I answered, suddenly realizing how little I did know.

"Where shall we put him?" said the orderly.

"There is no place," I answered. "Well, this man must have perfect quiet and good care," the assistant surgeon said, "or—" and he shrugged his shoulders meaningly.

For several weeks two of the nurses had been sharing my room on the third floor. They were on night duty just then, so I hurriedly sought them, explained the situation and asked if they thought we could manage some way for a night or two.

"Of course," they both said. "We'd do a great deal to save any man's life, but all the more since he is your friend."

"Oh, no," I hastened to explain, "he—he isn't exactly a friend."

"Oh, well, never mind," one of them on the operating table any longer, no matter whose friend he is or longer. We are not going to bed tonight at all, at all," she laughed, "and tomorrow we will manage somehow—but—what about you?"

"Oh, I'll find a place," I said. "Don't worry about that."

The place I really found was a little cot in my own room—that is, Captain Fraser's room—for the present. Somehow I could not bear to think of leaving him alone. In case of a hemorrhage in this condition I knew it would be all over with him.

An hour later, when I went back to the room, the sun had come up, and once again the dull, monotonous roll of artillery filled the air. From my window, owing to the clearness of the day, I could see the city, with its old square church towers and red roofs. From time to time all this was blotted out in a cloud of smoke and red dust caused by the falling of bricks and tiles.

Turning wearily away from the window, I went slowly over to the bed and gazed long and earnestly at the handsome, fine face and the strong, athletic body, gracefully outlined under the course linen sheet. There he lay, a splendid specimen of God's handiwork—helpless, finished, perhaps dying—and this was war! He was so white and still I gently felt for the pulse. It was jerky and intermittent. I decided that the doctor had better see him. I am afraid my touch, although I tried to make it light, must have disturbed him; for he opened his eyes and looked at me, it seemed for minutes, with a quizzical, rather worried expression. Then, slowly from his face and his eyes the draw, set look of pain disappeared, and he smiled up at me and said with a little of the ring in his voice that I remembered so well, "Why, you are the little girl from the boat!" and then relapsed into that dark borderland that lies between life and death.



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After Six Years of Suffering

Woman Made Well by Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

Columbus, Ohio.—"I had almost given up. I had been sick for six years with female troubles and nervousness. I had a pain in my right side and could not eat anything without hurting my stomach. I could not drink cold water at all nor eat any kind of raw fruit, nor fresh meat or chicken. From 178 pounds I went to 118 and would get so weak at times that I fell over. I began to take Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and ten days later I could eat and it did not hurt my stomach. I have taken the medicine ever since and I feel like a new woman. I now weigh 127 pounds so you can see what it has done for me already. My husband says he knows your medicine has saved my life."—Mrs. J. S. BARLOW, 1624 South 4th St., Columbus, Ohio.

It was getting late when he left the room and he had many kilometers to go, but he insisted on walking through the hospital saying a word to each of the men there, alluding to them as "mes braves petits soldats." In one of the beds there was a Scotchman. The general spoke to him and said, "You are one of the men that Germans call 'hol-lenweiber' (ladies from hell). Quick as a flash the Scot answered: "That's a great compliment, sir. It shows that they think we fight like devils," at which the general laughed good humorously.

For the last few days I had been doing extra work in the German prisoners' ward. Some way they came to know that I was from America, which made them eager to chat with me—in fact, so eager that it was only with difficulty I prevented it interfering with my work. One especially—he was, I should think, about thirty-five years old—a noncommissioned officer of the landwehr who had risen to a lieutenant. He did not look at all like a typical German officer, nor were his mental processes that of this class. Of him I harbor no patriotisms did not permit him to harbor any doubt of his country's ultimate success, but neither did he hide his desire for an early peace.

(To Be Continued.)

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