

UNDER WHITE FLAG—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9.

mess; but duties were so heavy that most times three or four were absent, and she had not commented on the fact. Now she understood, and an awful fear gripped her by the heart. She ran to her room, and, slipping on a heavy fur cloak, hurried down to the main gate.

"Sorry, miss," cried the sentry: "you can't pass. Our men will be coming back now. Stand back: here they come!"

From the darkness could be heard the sound of trampling feet, whilst the roar of musketry crackled up and down from the Boer trenches.

"Here they come!" was the cry: and the garrison crowded to welcome back their heroes. In her black cloak Rose Grant was almost invisible, and in the shadow of the gate she waited and prayed that her loved one might be safe.

Out of the gloom came panting men thronging into the gate, but an officer junior to Dalgetty was in charge of the company. A sergeant brought up the rear, and Rose stepped out of her refuge as the crowd of men momentarily halted in their passage into the town.

"Sergeant, where is the major?"

The man stared, so surprised was he to see a woman there.

"He's wounded, I'm afraid miss." Under the lamplight he saw her face grow deathly white.

"Sergeant!" She laid her hand on his arm. The perplexed man grounded his rifle heavily on a soldier's foot.

"Look out, sergeant!" was the indignant protest.

"Get me away from this gal, you fool!" the sergeant whispered. "She's asking after the major! Beg pardon, miss; I hear the officer calling me!" And, gently releasing her hand, he moved away.

Without a thought of the risk she was running, Rose Grant slipped past the sentry in the confusion, and was speeding along across the veldt, whilst around her and overhead sang and buzzed the bullets like venomous insects.

In the mess-hut the triumphant tale was being told, and loud regrets were uttered for the missing major, every man hoping that even now he might only be a prisoner. Suddenly an orderly came in with a message for the chief, and all turned with curiosity to watch the colonel's face. They watched its ruddy color fade away and no man spoke whilst they saw him pour out a general's peg of whiskey and hold it to his lips. They even heard the glass tinkle against his teeth, so sudden was the hush.

"Gentlemen, Miss Grant is reported missing," said the chief, in a dull voice. "She was seen by Sergeant Price at the main gate as the troops came in, and she asked where Dalgetty was; and—I fancy—she's gone to find him." The jerky sentence was finished, and almost simultaneously every man drained his glass and rose abruptly.

"I think I'll turn in now, sir," said one.

"Yes; I'm a bit done, too," said another.

A stern smile of exultation swept across the wrinkled face of the colonel as he looked round on his "boys" as he called them, with justifiable pride.

"Halt!" he cried: and every man was still. "You all know that I would give my right arm to bring that girl safely back again, but I have other duties to perform. Your lives, gentlemen, belong to your Queen and country, and you have no right to risk them on the errand you are all going upon. Yes; don't pretend you weren't. You wouldn't have been officers of the 10th if your way to 'turn in' didn't lie out yonder! But I won't have it! If any man quits camp to-night without my orders, by the Lord Harry, I'll drumhead court-martial him, and shoot him, if he were my own brother! Good-night, gentlemen!"

And out on the lonely veldt a shrinking, quivering woman crept forward toward the twinkling lights of the Boer position. She knew that those lights were the enemy tending their wounded and towards them she must go to find her lover. Once, as a bullet whistled by her, she lay on the ground and cried in the extremity of her terror, but then the thoughts of the man, lying perhaps at his last gasp, nerved her, and she crept forward once more.

Once she stumbled over a body, and an impulse seized her to run away and turn her back on her duty. With a terrible shrinking she passed her hand over the cold, still

face, and her heart bounded, as she knew, even in the darkness, that the man beside her was a youth on whose face the dawn of manhood had scarcely risen.

On, on she pressed, until she heard a low groan on her right. She coughed, and a faint cry of "Help!" sounded as music to her ears; for in those broken tones she recognized the voice of the man for whom she had risked so much.

"Help!" he moaned. And, feeling cautiously as she went, the heroic girl gained her lover's side.

"Help, for the love of Heaven!" The cry went to her heart, and dropping down on her knees beside the wounded man, she rained kisses upon his upturned face.

"My darling, it is I—Rose Grant! Thank Heaven you are still alive!"

"Rose Grant!" he muttered. "I'm dreaming! That won't do! That's the beginning of the end!"

"George, George, speak to me!" she cried. "I've come from the town to find you, and I'm horribly afraid, darling!"

Then George Dalgetty knew that his time of loneliness was overpast, and that life for him was to be one long dream of happiness. There, on the ground—with a bullet through his leg—suffering torture, he learnt how love can sweep everything away into forgetfulness. Her watchful ear heard his teeth chatter, and off came her cloak.

"Silence! I won't listen!" she said, as she wrapped the warm fur round him. "Now you rest your head against my shoulder, and we'll wait until daylight comes. I've got some of the cloak round me, too."

And so, through that chilly night, huddled together for warmth, the two lovers lay, the woman with her young arms round him, heartening the man to bear the pain of his shattered leg. Just before daybreak a Boer patrol, still searching for the wounded, almost fell over the prostrate figures.

Flashing a lantern over them, a low grunt of astonishment broke from the party, and Rose instantly sprang to her feet.

"A woman!" the man exclaimed, in English. "Hi, Albrecht, here is a wounded ronek and a woman!" His shout attracted the rest of the party, who hurried up.

"Keep quiet, George!" Rose said firmly. "This officer is wounded in the leg, and I, his affianced wife, am looking after him."

"But how came you here?" asked the field-cornet in charge of the patrol, speaking with a strong German accent.

"I heard he was missing last night, and I came to find him," she answered simply, whilst the light still illuminated her face. The man looked down on the soldier covered with the cloak, and then at the girl, and he removed his cap and fumbled with something on his breast.

"Madam," he began, "do you mean to say that you left the town in the face of our fire and searched for this soldier?"

"He was my future husband," she replied.

"Great Heaven," he muttered, "what courage!" Directly daylight comes the soldier shall be carried in under a flag of truce to the town, and our surgeon shall come to him at once, madam. I am a soldier of fortune, and fight where I can get my hire; but once I was a German officer. I fought in the Franco-Prussian War, and Prince Frederick Charles—God rest his soul!—gave me with his own hands the Iron Cross for valour. I have been proud of it; but will you keep it as a gift from a soldier to one more worthy of it?"

He handed to her the Cross, which she took, and held out her hand in the lamplight, whilst the rough men standing round wondered at the scene.

The German raised the dainty hand to his lips, and then turned and gave orders to his men to fetch the surgeon. "Good-bye!" he said simply.

Hardly had daylight broken before a white flag was seen by the besiegers at the main gate of the city, and promptly answered by another from the Boer lines. At once a party of men left the gate and streamed out on the veldt, meeting their enemies perfectly calm in the neutral zone. The colonel was with his men, and at once began to ask about Miss Grant.

"We have tended your wounded officer, sir," said the field-cornet. "Here comes your missing lady. If all your men are animated by her spirit I fear our task will be a heavy one."

As the stretcher party came in sight, with Rose walking beside it, Boer and Briton broke into a storm of cheering, and, thus welcomed, Dalgetty and his future bride made their triumphal entry into Mafeking.