

TURN THE DARK CLOUDS INSIDE OUT

Short Story

By Dorothy L. Warne

"Nannie, Nannie, he is getting twenty-four hours' leave this week-end, and arrives to-day. Oh, Nannie, my last week. Help me to carry this week-end through that Jim won't guess.

The old woman's eyes were dim as she averted her head from the young and wasted body lying under the frilly counterpane.

"He must not know, Nannie; Doctor McKay says I shall last another week, I heard him tell you so, and I feel as full of strength and will as a bird. Do people always feel like that when they are going to die?"

She raised herself in bed and studied the reflection in the mirror opposite, critically. "Just one thing, I'm too pale. Do you think that just the wee-est, tinst bit of rouge would be dreadfully wicked? Not now, perhaps . . ."

For an hour before the arrival of the creeping train at the sleepy little station they planned and worked together. Nannie coiled Betty's nut-brown curls round her dainty head. The suspicion of colour on her white cheeks gave a lustre to her eyes, and enhanced her fragile beauty. Then her best lilac silk gown was hooked on, and the pearls that Jim had given her when they were first engaged hung about her neck.

"Dearie," old Nannie hesitated when the last detail was in place. "Is it right, child, to deceive him?"

"Right? Don't you know that a soldiers' first duty is obedience, and if Jim knew that he would never see me again, he would refuse to return at the end of the twenty-four hours, and disgrace like that in France is terrible. One day he will be glad.

They spent the few precious hours in the cottage and garden. Betty felt better, but too tired to walk far, and Jim made wonderful plans for his next leave. In his own enthusiasm he did not notice how few comments his little sweetheart made.

She smiled till the last glimpse of his khaki-clad form had disappeared round the bend in the lane, then settled in the old woman's arms with pathetic little worn-out sobs.

It was five days later. Nannie held a flimsy bit of paper in her hand. Jim's battalion had gone into action the night he returned and had been nearly wiped out. . . .

Nannie looked at the beautiful, marble-still face on the pillow, surrounded by sweetly scented flowers. Then she reverently made the sign of the cross on her breast, and murmured, "God bless them both, and give them the reward they deserve."