

The NURSE'S STORY

By ADELE BLENEAU

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I tried to take my patient's pulse, but it was so irregular and rapid that it was impossible. In looking at him his eyes seemed already deeper and hollower, surrounded, as they were, by great dark shadows, and his hands, which lay flat on the cover, were so white that they were only distinguishable from the linen by the aureole of the veins.

I heard the light ticking of a clock on the mantle. I felt that time, the fugitive, was slipping by and what its passage might soon bring, I violently put the thought out of my mind. I could not bear it. Through those next hours there wasn't a moment but that I wasn't doing something—everything known to me—in fight of the dreaded end.

From 2 o'clock on every few moments my tired eyes sought the clock. I was terrified of those awful hours between 4 and 7, and in spite of all the stimulation I dared use, his vitality was ebbing. Terror overwhelmed me, left me without the power to combat the imaginings of death.

In the violet darkness my eyes met his, and suddenly I then came a new unfathomable expression. On the drawn white face I thought I noticed symptoms of the death agonies, symptoms of a dissolution already begun and inevitable. He was whiter than the pillow and as motionless. All night I had been turning it, as it became constantly wet with dripping perspiration. I was overcome with a sensation of weakness, a sensation of the fatality of what had happened and what was about to happen. An immense weight seemed to bear me down. Driven by that helplessness that often makes suffering humanity turn toward a Supreme Power, I fell on my knees, for science and nursing had failed. There remained only God's supreme intervention. I prayed as I never prayed in my life. In this hour-how futile all my little knowledge seemed! I rose from my knees with fresh courage to fight on, and a curious presentment came to me that far away in England another woman was sharing with me that silent night vigil and that agonized prayer—his mother.

I went to the window and looked up to the starlit heavens. How peaceful the sleeping world lay, in such cruel contrast to the agony with which my soul was wrung.

My eyes were drawn irresistibly back to the bed. I longed to go there, but I could not take a step. Minutes passed. Thoughts and images furrowed my brain. By supreme effort I conquered the terror that held me and quietly went to the bed. I put my hand to touch his forehead, but the will to do it failed me. Finally I held before his lips a little tuft of cotton—held it there with infinite precaution. The weaving of a thread showed the strength of his respiration. All my soul hung on those parched lips, between moments might render their last breath. I controlled myself and before trembling placed my fingers on the pulse. It was firmer, stronger. There could be no mistake. A little time went by; it seemed inevitable. I took the pulse again. The faintness of my patient was better. Looking up I caught with joy the first pale gray nuances of dawn. With the coming of the sunrise Captain Fraser weakly—oh, so weakly—struggled back to this side of the borderline which men call life.

ing heavy fighting in the course of the next ten days. You can go to Mlle. F. tomorrow, but you must be back here at the end of the week.

"I do not know why, but his decision gave me the greatest relief, even more—a sense of acute pressure.

In the natural course of things it would be an hour or two before my duties would call me to Captain Fraser's room. Generally the hours were never long enough to accomplish all that was to be done, but that day time scarcely passed—it fell drop by drop lazily and heavily. But at last the moment came to go to him.

The afternoon was soft and warm. I could hear the birds singing in the garden, and through the open window floated the perfume of the first autumn flowers, inspiring me with new ideas, a little like that of being afraid of oneself. To counteract this I kept saying over and over, "To be effective your work must be calm and concordant, calm and concordant." I repeated.

Then I turned to him and said: "Tomorrow I shall say good-by. I have been ordered to a typhoid hospital at one of the French bases."

He broke in, with a painful little smile in his eyes. "Please don't go. What will I do without you? I have thought about it all so much as I have lain here hour after hour. That I am not dead and buried these weeks goes I owe to you." There was a moment's pause, after which he added simply, "Now," and he emphasized the word.

"I can only thank you," he said. "Nonsense!" I replied. "When all is said and done it is nature that does your work." "Perhaps," he answered, "but in a case like mine nature only does so in conjunction with unpermitted and skillful care." Into his voice came a note new to my ears. He went on speaking. "That night—you know the night I mean—when it was just a toss-up whether I lived or died, I think if one could know how much will power has to do with things, it would be found that I lived because in a few lucid intervals I realized the heroic fight you were putting up for me, and subconsciously my will went out to help you. For when one is that near the other side, self, material things and interests count for little. But now," and he looked out across the hills, crowned with purple shadows, "realizing that on my life depends the happiness of my mother, my family, and that the life of any man who has had a certain training in warfare is valuable to his country, I am deeply grateful to fate that I am living—and fate in this case, my dear little nurse, means you," he said tensely.

"That's a very pretty speech," I answered lightly, "and I should so like to take it all to myself, but the very disillusioning fact remains that it was your subalter."

Without heeding my words he interrupted. "The disillusioning fact remains that you are going away, and he looked up at me with wide distraught eyes, and as he put out his hand and took mine I felt it tremble. "Don't go," he said, with a gesture of entreaty, and I hastened to explain that it was only for a few days, or a week at best, as I thought suddenly he looked not so well today and must not be worried by even trifles.

"I must go now," I said. "My other patients are needing me," and I hurried away toward the German ward. I had taken only a few steps when he called me back.

"I only wanted to say that some day you will know—what you—your kindness means to me," he said gravely, looking straight up into my eyes.

A sudden wild desire to say something, I hardly know what, possessed me, and a trembling I could not master overcame me.

"I am so glad I have been able to help a little," I stammered and ran quickly down the stairs.

It was only when I reached the ground floor that I remembered I had not told him the story of how he came to be at our hospital, but I resolved to do it before I left tomorrow.

CHAPTER VIII.

War Prisoners' Gossip. I got to the German ward I could go outdoors, through a court and pass in by a French window. I often did this, as it gave me a breath of air. It was twilight, but the lamps had not yet been lighted. Rubber-soled shoes made my approach noiseless, and as I came upon the little group of German prisoners I heard one of them say:

"Russia will want peace in the early summer, and France will seize the first possible opportunity to abandon the struggle, which will leave Germany free to fight it out with her true enemy—England." At which one of them picked up his glass—he was taking a tonic that was a little like thin wine and which gave an excuse for a toast—but instead of the cheer "Prost!" which the German usually uses he looked solemnly into the faces of his comrades, blinking like an owl, and said with an unmistakable vibration of his voice, "God punish England!" At the others, with equal feeling, responded, "God punish her!"

I was amazed at this. I had never heard it before and frankly said so. They assured me that in place of the honored "Auf wiedersehen" one often now hears this as a farewell. It originated with the officers and men in the field, but now all over Germany it was said with sincerity and earnestness.

I was always interested in their point of view, for the three who had

remained with us were of different opinion of their wounds were advised to and representative German. And from their hatred of England, they expressed, they were courteous, agreeable gentlemen. One was a Bavarian, another a Prussian, and the third a Saxon.

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It proved to be from a prisoner who was in prison at Torun, in Germany. He asked me to read it to him. It ran:

My Dear Ian—I thought perhaps you might want to know what a day's work out here is like. You know I was taken to Cologne and then on to Maastricht, where we were joined by a party of Scots. The journey was made in a cattle car, but our keepers were a decent sort, and it's all in a lifetime anyway. The only thing I really would like to resist is a kick in the German Red Cross. The four-hour train in the morning and were marched to the fortress. Our particular build, but as there were no trucks and the first built it to protect the bridge made over the Elbe for his great Russian ally.

Our building was divided into about fifty rooms which are British quarters. Out in the passages there are crude tables which are used for mess. There are twenty-five or thirty officers' messes together.

We have an exercise ground here which is a mile in circumference. At first we were in a trench, but the other day 300 French came in, and all the outposts, wagon sheds, etc., are used for them—batteries, but they manufacture shells. The women do the packing, and they must be believed that other than the English. Every day, in fact, they are now working double shift.

I had to go to tell you the international football match. That was between the French and English always draw good games in spite of the fact that the English always win. It was a very hard and rough, so we only play association. We did try the Eton game, but as there were no balls, we had to make up the two sides we had to fill in with men who, in some cases, had never seen the game played. The French were highly delighted at the formation and maneuvers of the men.

Discipline is kept up by the highest ranking officer of each nation. In our case we have Colonel Gordon of the German highlanders. The stick are looked after by the other respective medical officers. The Germans gave them the benefit of their superior skill in the beginning, but evidently, and being, seeing the same old patients day after day, so now we never see them except on hurried visits for hospital work.

We can get all sorts of medicines made up in the town, but they are very busy about selling and buying. I think if one could know how much will power has to do with things, it would be found that I lived because in a few lucid intervals I realized the heroic fight you were putting up for me, and subconsciously my will went out to help you. For when one is that near the other side, self, material things and interests count for little. But now," and he looked out across the hills, crowned with purple shadows, "realizing that on my life depends the happiness of my mother, my family, and that the life of any man who has had a certain training in warfare is valuable to his country, I am deeply grateful to fate that I am living—and fate in this case, my dear little nurse, means you," he said tensely.

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After cautioning him repeatedly about his medicine, diet, etc., for the nurse who would look after him was undoubtedly busy, I said good night and, good-bye, for I was leaving very early on the morrow.

HE WILL FORGIVE.

THE next morning I went by train to the town where the fever hospital was located. An hour away the contour of the country changed. Chains of hills rolled away in a peaceful undulating line, and trees in the distance with their thick foliage appeared like a great wave of green fog. Here and there the autumn coloring looked like huge bouquets of red and yellow flowers, while the sky overhead was a beautiful pool of light turquoise.

There had been a little time in the month for self-communion that I enjoyed to the uttermost this chance for quiet and repose. I stretched out on the cushions, oblivious of the heat and dust, thought of approaching events, considered the future possibilities and essayed to penetrate the great darkness that engulfed us all. The hours passed, and I was there before I dreamed it was time to arrive.

I found the hospital not yet systematized, the patients streaming in in such numbers as to prevent almost any attempt at organization. Mlle. F., in showing me around, said when we came to the operating room: "It is as if fate meant to have a good laugh at us. We have here a whole service of rare and expensive tools; we have an otophagoscope and the very latest pattern of stethoscope and a marvelous set of tools for plating fractures, but we have no knives, no artery forceps and not a stitch of catgut."

We had to laugh. It was a little like having a gold service from which to eat and not a crumb of bread. Hasty telephone messages soon reminded that the conditions in the hospital were pathetic in the extreme. Hundreds of men lay in the wards, and the single bathtub in the place. It was not, however, that France was indifferent or unable. It was an avalanche of wounded descended on a country totally unprepared.

On my return Captain Fraser was greatly interested in the tales that the men had told me down at the fever hospital as his regiment had been fighting in that locality for some months just before they had been ordered to —. My stories led him to visualize for me an average twenty-four hours down there in the trenches. "Personally," he began, "I believe that the men had their fingers pretty well out, but they stuck it like good chips and made a bully accomplishment. The job was an exhausting one, but as I am not a liar not altogether a fool I frankly confess I was glad when it was over."

"As I went back through the trenches that morning just before dawn I passed a number of men who were making something between their teeth, and I stopped a moment, curious to hear what it was. They were actually praying that God Almighty would give the Germans sufficient grace to make them come out and attack us just to warm us up. Both men and officers of that company evidently felt alike, as I heard their colonel saying to them, 'And if they come, no surrender, kids, as you have your rifles and then your fists.' As if in answer to their prayers rifles began to crack all around."

"Just before I reached the end of the last trench I was surprised to hear the order, 'Cease firing!' and when I turned to learn what had occasioned this unusual command, I saw a wounded German lying halfway between our lines and his. An officer who had gone out to pick up the man was struck before the Germans realized what he was doing, and themselves ceased firing. Nothing daunted, the British officer staggered to the fallen man and half carried, half dragged him to the German lines. The officer on duty received him with a salute, and the men in the trenches set up a lusty cheer. Then the German officer took off his own iron cross and pinned it upon the breast of the man in khaki, and as he staggered back to our trench we could still hear the Germans cheering. Poor fellow! he will get a medal."

I said something about the "fatal" nature of shot and shell. Captain Fraser laughed and replied, "Well, really, that sort of music is not for the faint of heart, but it is not for the dog that bites before it barks."

"At last," the captain continued, "we came to a forward trench, which might be better described as a watercourse. In the half gray light it seemed a dim mysterious background, to the mud and gray sandbag walls against which mad gray soldiers in full equipment were alternately standing or lying. These latter are supposed to be asleep, and for the most part they are, for with the fatigue and exhaustion of it all it keeps more than the fear of death to keep a man awake."

"Among other things we were told of to put up a wire entanglement. The noise of our equipment disturbed the snored sleep of a subaltern. I heard him say quickly to a sentry, 'Heard anything?' and the reply, 'A rifle shot half an hour ago.' 'Theirs or ours?' 'It was a Manner, sir.' A second more, and they both heard us. 'Who goes there?' 'A sentry.' I answered, giving back to the sentry of my rifle and receiving one in return. Each platoon has its own system of signals. The subaltern gave an order to one of his N. C. O. that the men 'Stand to,' for you know every man in the trenches from the commencement of dawn must be awake and ready for the attack which often comes at that hour. This is supposed to be accomplished without noise, but sleep, still men are not likely to be light of foot, and the rattle of equipment makes a noise that to the officers seems thunderous, but perhaps

it isn't so bad as we think, for our nerves are not what they once were.

"We passed on and reached the sniper's hole, which is a little apart from the main trench, and for that reason likely to escape the attention of the enemy. But it has its disadvantages for one has to sit practically motionless, as the place has no parapet, and the only way we could see outside was by using a periscope. That little instrument is a wonderful invention. Without it we could see nothing but the walls of the hole in which we stood. But by applying it without moving an inch we had before us a view of the countryside, trenches and wire entanglements, while the sandbags and the slit holes showed up as if under a microscope. Fifty yards away was a loophole in the German trenches. Two lively men in a trench very near occupied our attention. We envied them their activity. They seemed to be able to find targets after all the rest of the line was quiet, and we wondered if they took an enemy's life with every eye of their carefully fixed shot."

We saw two soldiers in red and blue uniforms lying in the forbidden line between the trenches, one with a whitened skull.

"Then night came on. We had a lot of barbed wire to put up in front of a new trench a little lower down. About midnight I was joined by my best N. C. O. and four or five other men. We were as silent as possible, but in spite of sandbags to deaden the sound we did make rather a row driving in the dirt. The Germans heard us, for they sent up two star shells. The first was on one left, but the next quite near. We stood motionless. Fortunately we were against a dark background. Thus the beggars began sweeping right and left with their machine guns, and we laid flat in the mud for a time. We could hear a German playing a mouth organ. On the damp, still night air the sound came to us very clearly. He was playing 'Rip Van Winkle.' Presently we got to work again, but in half an hour the Germans began sniping. I decided it was too risky to go on. Another wait, and then fortunately it began sneezing. We kept wiring until about 2 a. m. and got our allotment finished. Then we found that the sentries had all been changed while we were out, and two or three officers had met their end. It was a working party was in front. The N. C. O.'s duty should have made sure of that point also. As it was, a very much alarmed platoon sergeant crept across to tell us of the unexpected risk we had been running. We had used up four or five rolls of wire, and some of the men had their fingers pretty well out, but they stuck it like good chips and made a bully accomplishment. The job was an exhausting one, but as I am not a liar not altogether a fool I frankly confess I was glad when it was over."

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devil! He was recommended for the Victoria cross, but he didn't live to wear it. He died from the wounds he got.

"Nothing but death, however, can quench Tommy's good humor," he laughed. "I heard one of them tell a chap who had lost his way that if he would go down by the Villa de Dugout and turn to the left, he would find the circus he would come to the Hotel Cecil. The chap started on. A little farther down the line a man at one of the loopholes called out, 'Here comes Jane, and they all dived into their pits, 'Jane' being a twelve inch shell."

One morning about 5 o'clock the marrison came to my rooms and said that a telephone message from B., a place some forty kilometers away, reported they were in desperate need of an interpreter. There had been asked for three other hospital for a nurse who spoke German, but none was available, and she wished me to be ready in half an hour to go there for the day. The road was in pretty good condition and clear of sentries, so we reached B. by 7 o'clock.

There had been only one thing of unusual interest on the way. From the top of a hill a mile or so across the valley we saw an ambulance train creeping along. Flaming red crosses covered the sides of the coaches. Before our amazed eyes, a few moments later, light puffs of smoke danced around them. Shells fell before and behind the train, but still the train kept moving. Would it reach the next station and get beyond range? We asked each other breathlessly, the chauffeur and I. We followed it for fully ten minutes, and then it vanished behind a slope. It was like a cinematograph with its inevitable train and engine, but with the difference that the train looked small and distant, while the report of the guns was near and very real. We learned later that only one shot had killed its mark, but that that one had killed three helpless men as they lay.

When we arrived we met the head surgeon. He was a straight, unassuming Englishman, and even under such stress his uniform looked spick and span, his boots polished, and he was wearing a gleaming monocle. But above all his clear eyes, looking directly at you, gave an idea of energy, vitality and superiority.

B. was the station from which the English ambulance train went down to Boulogne. It seemed as if there must be hundreds of ambulances already there, as well as dozens upon dozens of ambulance cars. As fast as one train was filled it pulled out, and other cars were pushed in to take their places. There was such perfect method in the system that by mid-afternoon we saw the last train slowly depart.

The surgeon knew we had been ordered to return by way of the battle front and bring with us a load of wounded, as there had been a perfect fiasco in the previous. As he bade us good-by and thanked us for helping he asked me:

"Have you ever been on the field after a battle?" I replied in the negative. Shaking his head sadly, he said: "It is too horrible to attempt to describe, and I advise you to remain in your ambulance."

I assured him if it were possible I should.

We took a long time getting to the rendezvous, as there were sentries everywhere, and we had to pick out words that were sheltered from shell fire. As the train was such a possibility could get the two men left the car and myself in a shelter behind a little hill among the trees, for I did as the Englishman had advised, remained in the ambulance—that is, until the medical major needed a nurse for a particular case. And so it was, going to him I passed a battery of 75 about a hundred yards away. Fire at intervals, and a platoon of men standing motionless, ready for orders. Ammunition wagons drawn by mules were passing to and from the guns, while in the factory of all sorts was being hurried on the way.

The French had captured some trenches, and a counter attack was expected. Even then the fire was so heavy it was not possible to move, but about dusk it ceased somewhat. Soon the moon rose, and the night was a fantastic one. We were in a clearing, the moon was full, and by its light we could plainly see the ridge against the sky line a few hundred yards away on which the French had successfully repulsed the onslaught. All about us were officers and soldiers of every kind and condition. Among the trees were several hundred cavalrymen mounted

or standing by their horses. Threading their way everywhere were the stretcher bearers bringing in their pathetic burdens. The ambulances came up one at a time, were loaded and sent away. Many of the wounded lay still and quiet; others were moaning, shrieking, praying or cursing, and almost all of them begging for water. Some of the wounds were so indescribably horrible that for the poor victims' sake we almost hoped they would not live.

In sharp contrast to this officers were standing about quietly talking and smoking as though such a thing as war did not exist. The medical major would occasionally, after a brief business examination, give orders for a stretcher to be moved aside under the trees. "It was the death warrant for its wretched occupants. Many did not seem to be in great pain, and I noticed that this often was a bad sign. One poor fellow smiled up at me, pressed my hand in gratitude for a mouthful of warm wine and said, "There is no use to pray for the nurses—heaven is waiting for them." And in an hour he, too, had joined the little band beneath the pines.



"God punish her!"



The British Officer Dragged the Fallen Man to German Lines.

RUSSIAN ONE... FRENCH PROG... LONDON, Ja... TELEGRAPH STAT... FORCES ON THE... THIS RETIREME... TODAY'S OFFICIAL... THE AMOUNT OF WA... IN GREAT DISORDER... THE RUSSIAN... VON LINSINGEN, SO... MAKE A STAND AFT... COSSACKS ARE... THROUGH THE SOUTH... NORTHWEST OF... MARAMAROS SAIGER... FRONT TODAY... THIS INFORMAT... ABOUT FIFTY MILE... THE FORTIFIABLE... FRENCH FRONT... THEREFORE, IT... EMPRES OR IT... NO DISTANT DREAM... FURIOUS BA... LONDON, July... MORE THAN TWO M... IN THE SHELL SW... GERMAN ARE STRIK... AN EFFORT TO RECAP... THE FIRST GER... LING, AFTER, A DAY... TERTERED SERIOUSLY... GERMAN PREPARATION... LATE IN THE AFT... THIRD LINE, EAST OF... HIGH EXPLOSIVE SHE... PRODUCING SHELLS... DITION, THE WIND CA... MANS LOOSER GREAT... THE CLOUDS, ADVANCE... DEVELOPED EARLY AL... WAGED WITH GREAT F... OFFICE AT A LATE HO...