

CHAPTER X

THE WAR'S VICTIMS

While the others were conversing on deck Maud Stanton was ministering to the maimed victims of the war's cruelty, who tossed and moaned below. The main cabin and its accompanying staterooms had been fitted with all the conveniences of a modern hospital. Twenty-two could easily be accommodated in the rooms and a dozen more in the cabin, so that the eleven now in their charge were easily cared for. Of these, only three had been seriously injured. One was the German, who, however, was now sleeping soundly under the influence of the soothing potion that followed his operation. The man's calmness and iron nerve indicated that he would make a rapid recovery. Another was the young Belgian soldier picked up in the roadway near the firing line, who had been shot in the back and had not yet recovered consciousness. Dr. Gys had removed several bits of exploded shell and dressed the wound, shaking his head discouragingly. But since the young man was still breathing, with a fairly regular respiration, no attempt was made to restore him to his senses.

The third seriously injured was a French sergeant whose body was literally riddled with shrapnel. A brief examination had convinced Gys that the case was hopeless.

"He may live until morning," was the doctor's report as he calmly looked down upon the moaning sergeant, "but no longer. Meanwhile, we must prevent his suffering."

This he accomplished by means of powerful drugs. The soldier soon lay in a stupor, awaiting the end, and nothing more could be done for him.

Of the others, two Belgians with bandaged heads were playing a quiet game of *écarté* in a corner of the cabin, while another with a slight wound in his leg was stretched upon a couch, reading a book. A young French officer who had lost three fingers of his hand was cheerfully conversing with a comrade whose scalp had been torn by a bullet and who declared that in two days he would return to the front. The others Maud found asleep in their berths or lying quietly to ease their pain. It was remarkable, however, how little suffering was caused these men by flesh wounds, once they were properly dressed and the patients made comfortable with food and warmth and the assurance of proper care.

So it was that Maud found her duties not at all arduous this evening. Indeed, the sympathy she felt for these brave men was so strong that it wearied her more than the actual work of nursing them. A sip of water here, a cold compress there, the administration of medicines to keep down or prevent fever, little attentions of this character were all that were required. Speaking French fluently, she was able to converse with all those under her charge and all seemed eager to relate to their beautiful nurse their experiences, hopes and griefs. Soon she realized

she was beginning to learn more of the true nature of war than she had ever gleaned from the correspondents of the newspapers.

When dinner was served in the forward cabin Beth relieved Maud and after the evening meal Dr. Gys made another inspection of his patients. All seemed doing well except the young Belgian. The condition of the French sergeant was still unchanged. Some of those with minor injuries were ordered on deck for a breath of fresh air.

Patsy relieved Beth at midnight and Maud came on duty again at six o'clock, having had several hours of refreshing sleep. She found Patsy trembling with nervousness, for the sergeant had passed away an hour previous and the horror of the event had quite upset the girl.

"Oh, it is all so unnecessary!" she wailed as she threw herself into Maud's arms.

"We must steel ourselves to such things, dear," said Maud, soothing her, "for they will be of frequent occurrence, I fear. And we must be grateful and glad that we were able to relieve the poor man's anguish and secure for him a peaceful end."

"I know," answered Patsy with a little sob, "but it's so dreadful. Oh, what a cruel, hateful thing war is!"

From papers found on the sergeant Uncle John was able to notify his

relatives of his fate. His home was in a little village not fifty miles away and during the day a brother arrived to take charge of the remains and convey them to their last resting place.

The following morning Captain Carg was notified by the authorities to withdraw the Arabella to an anchorage farther out in the bay, and thereafter it became necessary to use the two launches for intercourse between the ship and the city. Continuous cannonading could be heard from the direction of Nieuport, Dixmude and Ypres, and it was evident that the battle had doubled in intensity at all points, owing to heavy reinforcements being added to both sides. But, as Maurie had predicted, the Allies were able to hold the foe at bay and keep them from advancing a step farther.

Uncle John had not been at all satisfied with that first day's experience at the front. He firmly believed it was unwise, to the verge of rashness, to allow the girls to place themselves in so dangerous a position. During a serious consultation with Jones, Kelsey, Captain Carg and Dr. Gys, the men agreed upon a better plan of procedure.

"The three nurses have plenty to do in attending to the patients in our hospital," said Gys, "and when the ship has its full quota of wounded they will need assistance or they will break down under the strain. Our young ladies are different from the professional nurses; they are so keenly sensitive that they suffer from sympathy with every patient that comes under their care."

"I do not favor their leaving the ship," remarked Dr. Kelsey, the mate.

"There seems to be plenty of field workers at the front, supplied by the governments whose troops are fighting."

"Therefore," added Jones, "we men must assume the duty of driving the ambulances and bringing back the wounded we are able to pick up. As Maurie is too stiff from his wound to drive to-day, I shall undertake the job myself. I know the way, now, and am confident I shall get along nicely. Who will go with me?"

"I will, of course," replied Kelsey quietly.

"Doctor Gys will be needed on the ship," asserted Uncle John.

"Yes, it will be best to leave me here," said Gys. "I'm too great a coward to go near the firing line again. It destroys my usefulness, and Kelsey can administer first aid as well as I."

"In that case, I think I shall take the small ambulance to-day," decided Ajo. "With Dr. Kelsey and one of the sailors we shall manage very well."

A launch took them ashore, where the ambulances stood upon the dock. Maurie had admitted his inability to drive, but asked to be allowed to go into the town. So he left the ship with the others and disappeared for the day.

Ajo took the same route he had covered before, in the direction of Nieuport, but could not get within five miles of the town, which was now held by the Germans. From Furnes to the front the roads were packed with reinforcements and wagon trains bearing ammunition and supplies, and further progress with the ambulance was impossible.

However, a constant stream of wounded flowed to the rear, some with first aid bandages covering their injuries, others as yet uncared for. Kelsey chose those whom he considered most in need of surgical care or skillful nursing, and by noon the ambulance was filled to overflowing. It was Jones who advised taking none of the fatally injured, as the army surgeons paid especial attention to these. The Americans could be of most practical use, the boy considered, by taking in charge such as had a chance to recover. So nine more patients were added to the ship's colony on this occasion, all being delivered to the care of Dr. Gys without accident or delay--a fact that rendered Ajo quite proud of his skillful driving.

While the ambulance was away the girls quietly passed from berth to berth, encouraging and caring for their wounded. It was surprising how interested they became in the personality of these soldiers, for each man was distinctive either in individuality or the character of his injury, and most of them were eager to chat with their nurses and anxious for news of the battle.

During the morning the young Belgian who had lain until now in a stupor, recovered consciousness. He had moaned once or twice, drawing Maud to his side, but hearing a different sound from him she approached the berth where he lay, to find his eyes wide open. Gradually he turned them upon his nurse, as if feeling her presence, and after a moment of observation he sighed and then smiled wanly.

"Still on earth?" he said in French.

"I am so glad," she replied. "You have been in dreamland a long time."

He tried to move and it brought a moan to his lips.

"Don't stir," she counseled warningly; "you are badly wounded."

He was silent for a time, staring at the ceiling. She held some water to his lips and he drank eagerly. Finally he said in a faint voice:

"I remember, now. I had turned to reload and it hit me in the back. A bullet, mademoiselle?"

"Part of a shell."

"Ah, I understand.... I tried to get to the rear. The pain was terrible. No one seemed to notice me. At last I fell, and--then I slept. I thought it was the end."

She bathed his forehead, saying:

"You must not talk any more at present. Here comes the doctor to see you."

Gys, busy in the cabin, had heard their voices and now came to look at his most interesting patient. The soldier seemed about twenty years of age; he was rather handsome, with expressive eyes and features bearing the stamp of culture. Already they knew his name, by means of an identification card found upon him, as well as a small packet of letters carefully pinned in an inner pocket of his coat. These last were all addressed in the same handwriting, which was undoubtedly feminine, to Andrew Denton. The card stated that Andrew Denton, private, was formerly an insurance agent at Antwerp.

Doctor Gys had rather impatiently awaited the young man's return to consciousness that he might complete his examination. He now devoted the next half hour to a careful diagnosis of Denton's injuries. By this time the patient was suffering intense pain and a hypodermic injection of morphine was required to relieve him. When at last he was quietly drowsing the doctor called Maud aside to give her instructions.

"Watch him carefully," said he, "and don't let him suffer. Keep up the morphine."

"There is no hope, then?" she asked.

"Not the slightest. He may linger for days--even weeks, if we sustain his strength--but recovery is impossible. That bit of shell tore a horrible hole in the poor fellow and all we can do is keep him comfortable until the end. Without the morphine he would not live twelve hours."

"Shall I let him talk?"

"If he wishes to. His lungs are not involved, so it can do him no harm."

But Andrew Denton did not care to talk any more that day. He wanted to think, and lay quietly until Beth came on duty. To her he gave a smile and a word of thanks and again lapsed into thoughtful silence.

When Ajo brought the new consignment of wounded to the ship the doctors and nurses found themselves pretty busy for a time. With wounds to dress and one or two slight operations to perform, the afternoon passed swiftly away. The old patients must not be neglected, either, so Captain Carg said he would sit with the German and look after him, as he was able to converse with the patient in his own tongue.

The German was resting easily to-day but proved as glum and uncommunicative as ever. That did not worry the captain, who gave the man a cigarette and, when it was nonchalantly accepted, lighted his own

pipe. Together they sat in silence and smoked, the German occupying an easy chair and resting his leg upon a stool, for he had refused to lie in a berth. Through the open window the dull boom of artillery could constantly be heard. After an hour or so:

"A long fight," remarked the captain in German.

The other merely looked at him, contemplatively. Carg stared for five minutes at the bandaged foot. Finally:

"Hard luck," said he.

This time the German nodded, looking at the foot also.

"In America," resumed the captain, puffing slowly, "they make fine artificial feet. Walk all right. Look natural."

"Vienna," said the German.

"Yes, I suppose so." Another pause.

"Name?" asked the German, with startling abruptness. But the other never winked.

"Carg. I'm a sailor. Captain of this ship. Live in Sangoa, when ashore."

"Sangoa?"

"Island in South Seas."

The wounded man reached for another cigarette and lighted it.

"Carg," he repeated, musingly. "German?"

"Why, my folks were, I believe. I've relations in Germany, yet. Munich. Visited them once, when a boy. Mother's name was Elbl. The Cargs lived next door to the Elbls. But they've lost track of me, and I of them. Nothing in common, you see."

The German finished his cigarette, looking at the captain at times reflectively. Carg, feeling his biography had not been appreciated, had lapsed into silence. At length the wounded man began feeling in his breast pocket--an awkward operation because the least action disturbed the swathed limb--and presently drew out a leather card case. With much deliberation he abstracted a card and handed it to the captain, who put on his spectacles and read:

"Otto Elbl. 12th Uhlans"

"Oh," he said, looking up to examine the German anew. "Otto Elbl of Munich?"

"Yes."

"H-m. Number 121 Friedrichstrasse?"

"Yes."

"I didn't see you when I visited your family. They said you were at college. Your father was William Elbl, my mother's brother."

The German stretched out his hand and gripped the fist of the captain.

"Cousins," he said.

Carg nodded, meditating.

"To be sure," he presently returned; "cousins. Have another cigarette."