

CHAPTER IX

DOC HAS A MISADVENTURE

"The war will not be over before next spring now," said Dr. Blythe, when it became apparent that the long battle of the Aisne had resulted in a stalemate.

Rilla was murmuring "knit four, purl one" under her breath, and rocking the baby's cradle with one foot. Morgan disapproved of cradles for babies but Susan did not, and it was worth while to make some slight sacrifice of principle to keep Susan in good humour. She laid down her knitting for a moment and said, "Oh, how can we bear it so long?"--then picked up her sock and went on. The Rilla of two months before would have rushed off to Rainbow Valley and cried.

Miss Oliver sighed and Mrs. Blythe clasped her hands for a moment. Then Susan said briskly, "Well, we must just gird up our loins and pitch in. Business as usual is England's motto, they tell me, Mrs. Dr. dear, and I have taken it for mine, not thinking I could easily find a better. I shall make the same kind of pudding today I always make on Saturday. It is a good deal of trouble to make, and that is well, for it will employ my thoughts. I will remember that Kitchener is at the helm and Joffer is doing very well for a Frenchman. I shall get that box of cake off to little Jem and finish that pair of socks today likewise. A sock a day is my allowance. Old Mrs. Albert Mead of Harbour Head manages a pair

and a half a day but she has nothing to do but knit. You know, Mrs. Dr. dear, she has been bed-ridden for years and she has been worrying terrible because she was no good to anybody and a dreadful expense, and yet could not die and be out of the way. And now they tell me she is quite chirped up and resigned to living because there is something she can do, and she knits for the soldiers from daylight to dark. Even Cousin Sophia has taken to knitting, Mrs. Dr. dear, and it is a good thing, for she cannot think of quite so many doleful speeches to make when her hands are busy with her needles instead of being folded on her stomach. She thinks we will all be Germans this time next year but I tell her it will take more than a year to make a German out of me. Do you know that Rick MacAllister has enlisted, Mrs. Dr. dear? And they say Joe Milgrave would too, only he is afraid that if he does that Whiskers-on-the-moon will not let him have Miranda. Whiskers says that he will believe the stories of German atrocities when he sees them, and that it is a good thing that Rangs Cathedral has been destroyed because it was a Roman Catholic church. Now, I am not a Roman Catholic, Mrs. Dr. dear, being born and bred a good Presbyterian and meaning to live and die one, but I maintain that the Catholics have as good a right to their churches as we have to ours and that the Huns had no kind of business to destroy them. Just think, Mrs. Dr. dear," concluded Susan pathetically, "how we would feel if a German shell knocked down the spire of our church here in the glen, and I'm sure it is every bit as bad to think of Rangs cathedral being hammered to pieces."

And, meanwhile, everywhere, the lads of the world rich and poor, low

and high, white and brown, were following the Piper's call.

"Even Billy Andrews' boy is going--and Jane's only son--and Diana's little Jack," said Mrs. Blythe. "Priscilla's son has gone from Japan and Stella's from Vancouver--and both the Rev. Jo's boys. Philippa writes that her boys 'went right away, not being afflicted with her indecision."

"Jem says that he thinks they will be leaving very soon now, and that he will not be able to get leave to come so far before they go, as they will have to start at a few hours' notice," said the doctor, passing the letter to his wife.

"That is not fair," said Susan indignantly. "Has Sir Sam Hughes no regard for our feelings? The idea of whisking that blessed boy away to Europe without letting us even have a last glimpse of him! If I were you, doctor dear, I would write to the papers about it."

"Perhaps it is as well," said the disappointed mother. "I don't believe I could bear another parting from him--now that I know the war will not be over as soon as we hoped when he left first. Oh, if only--but no, I won't say it! Like Susan and Rilla," concluded Mrs. Blythe, achieving a laugh, "I am determined to be a heroine."

"You're all good stuff," said the doctor, "I'm proud of my women folk. Even Rilla here, my 'lily of the field,' is running a Red Cross Society

full blast and saving a little life for Canada. That's a good piece of work. Rilla, daughter of Anne, what are you going to call your war-baby?"

"I'm waiting to hear from Jim Anderson," said Rilla. "He may want to name his own child."

But as the autumn weeks went by no word came from Jim Anderson, who had

never been heard from since he sailed from Halifax, and to whom the fate of wife and child seemed a matter of indifference. Eventually Rilla decided to call the baby James, and Susan opined that Kitchener should be added thereto. So James Kitchener Anderson became the possessor of a name somewhat more imposing than himself. The Ingleside family promptly shortened it to Jims, but Susan obstinately called him "Little Kitchener" and nothing else.

"Jims is no name for a Christian child, Mrs. Dr. dear," she said disapprovingly. "Cousin Sophia says it is too flippant, and for once I consider she utters sense, though I would not please her by openly agreeing with her. As for the child, he is beginning to look something like a baby, and I must admit that Rilla is wonderful with him, though I would not pamper pride by saying so to her face. Mrs. Dr. dear, I shall never, no never, forget the first sight I had of that infant, lying in that big soup tureen, rolled up in dirty flannel. It is not often that Susan Baker is flabbergasted, but flabbergasted I was then,

and that you may tie to. For one awful moment I thought my mind had given way and that I was seeing visions. Then thinks I, 'No, I never heard of anyone having a vision of a soup tureen, so it must be real at least,' and I plucked up confidence. When I heard the doctor tell Rilla that she must take care of the baby I thought he was joking, for I did not believe for a minute she would or could do it. But you see what has happened and it is making a woman of her. When we have to do a thing, Mrs. Dr. dear, we can do it."

Susan added another proof to this concluding dictum of hers one day in October. The doctor and his wife were away. Rilla was presiding over Jims' afternoon siesta upstairs, purling four and knitting one with ceaseless vim. Susan was seated on the back veranda, shelling beans, and Cousin Sophia was helping her. Peace and tranquility brooded over the Glen; the sky was fleeced over with silvery, shining clouds.

Rainbow Valley lay in a soft, autumnal haze of fairy purple. The maple grove was a burning bush of colour and the hedge of sweet-briar around the kitchen yard was a thing of wonder in its subtle tintings. It did not seem that strife could be in the world, and Susan's faithful heart was lulled into a brief forgetfulness, although she had lain awake most of the preceding night thinking of little Jem far out on the Atlantic, where the great fleet was carrying Canada's first army across the ocean. Even Cousin Sophia looked less melancholy than usual and admitted that there was not much fault to be found in the day, although there was no doubt it was a weather-breeder and there would be an awful storm on its heels.

"Things is too calm to last," she said.

As if in confirmation of her assertion, a most unearthly din suddenly arose behind them. It was quite impossible to describe the confused medley of bangs and rattles and muffled shrieks and yowls that proceeded from the kitchen, accompanied by occasional crashes. Susan and Cousin Sophia stared at each other in dismay.

"What upon airth has bruk loose in there?" gasped Cousin Sophia.

"It must be that Hyde-cat gone clean mad at last," muttered Susan. "I have always expected it."

Rilla came flying out of the side door of the living-room.

"What has happened?" she demanded.

"It is beyond me to say, but that possessed beast of yours is evidently at the bottom of it," said Susan. "Do not go near him, at least. I will open the door and peep in. There goes some more of the crockery. I have always said that the devil was in him and that I will tie to."

"It is my opinion that the cat has hydrophobia," said Cousin Sophia solemnly. "I once heard of a cat that went mad and bit three people--and they all died a most terrible death, and turned black as

ink."

Undismayed by this, Susan opened the door and looked in. The floor was littered with fragments of broken dishes, for it seemed that the fatal tragedy had taken place on the long dresser where Susan's array of cooking bowls had been marshalled in shining state. Around the kitchen tore a frantic cat, with his head wedged tightly in an old salmon can. Blindly he careered about with shrieks and profanity commingled, now banging the can madly against anything he encountered, now trying vainly to wrench it off with his paws.

The sight was so funny that Rilla doubled up with laughter. Susan looked at her reproachfully.

"I see nothing to laugh at. That beast has broken your ma's big blue mixing-bowl that she brought from Green Gables when she was married. That is no small calamity, in my opinion. But the thing to consider now is how to get that can off Hyde's head."

"Don't you dast go touching it," exclaimed Cousin Sophia, galvanized into animation. "It might be your death. Shut the kitchen up and send for Albert."

"I am not in the habit of sending for Albert during family difficulties," said Susan loftily. "That beast is in torment, and whatever my opinion of him may be, I cannot endure to see him suffering

pain. You keep away, Rilla, for little Kitchener's sake, and I will see what I can do."

Susan stalked undauntedly into the kitchen, seized an old storm coat of the doctor's and after a wild pursuit and several fruitless dashes and pounces, managed to throw it over the cat and can. Then she proceeded to saw the can loose with a can-opener, while Rilla held the squirming animal, rolled in the coat. Anything like Doc's shrieks while the process was going on was never heard at Ingleside. Susan was in mortal dread that the Albert Crawfords would hear it and conclude she was torturing the creature to death. Doc was a wrathful and indignant cat when he was freed. Evidently he thought the whole thing was a put-up job to bring him low. He gave Susan a baleful glance by way of gratitude and rushed out of the kitchen to take sanctuary in the jungle of the sweet-briar hedge, where he sulked for the rest of the day. Susan swept up her broken dishes grimly.

"The Huns themselves couldn't have worked more havoc here," she said bitterly. "But when people will keep a Satanic animal like that, in spite of all warnings, they cannot complain when their wedding bowls get broken. Things have come to a pretty pass when an honest woman cannot leave her kitchen for a few minutes without a fiend of a cat rampaging through it with his head in a salmon can."