

## CHAPTER XXIX

### "WOUNDED AND MISSING"

"Battered but Not Broken" was the headline in Monday's paper, and Susan repeated it over and over to herself as she went about her work. The gap caused by the St. Quentin disaster had been patched up in time, but the Allied line was being pushed relentlessly back from the territory they had purchased in 1917 with half a million lives. On Wednesday the headline was "British and French Check Germans"; but still the retreat went on. Back--and back--and back! Where would it end? Would the line break again--this time disastrously?

On Saturday the headline was "Even Berlin Admits Offensive Checked," and for the first time in that terrible week the Ingleside folk dared to draw a long breath.

"Well, we have got one week over--now for the next," said Susan staunchly.

"I feel like a prisoner on the rack when they stopped turning it," Miss Oliver said to Rilla, as they went to church on Easter morning. "But I am not off the rack. The torture may begin again at any time."

"I doubted God last Sunday," said Rilla, "but I don't doubt him today. Evil cannot win. Spirit is on our side and it is bound to outlast

flesh."

Nevertheless her faith was often tried in the dark spring that followed. Armageddon was not, as they had hoped, a matter of a few days. It stretched out into weeks and months. Again and again Hindenburg struck his savage, sudden blows, with alarming, though futile success. Again and again the military critics declared the situation extremely perilous. Again and again Cousin Sophia agreed with the military critics.

"If the Allies go back three miles more the war is lost," she wailed.

"Is the British navy anchored in those three miles?" demanded Susan scornfully.

"It is the opinion of a man who knows all about it," said Cousin Sophia solemnly.

"There is no such person," retorted Susan. "As for the military critics, they do not know one blessed thing about it, any more than you or I. They have been mistaken times out of number. Why do you always look on the dark side, Sophia Crawford?"

"Because there ain't any bright side, Susan Baker."

"Oh, is there not? It is the twentieth of April, and Hindy is not in

Paris yet, although he said he would be there by April first. Is that not a bright spot at least?"

"It is my opinion that the Germans will be in Paris before very long and more than that, Susan Baker, they will be in Canada."

"Not in this part of it. The Huns shall never set foot in Prince Edward Island as long as I can handle a pitchfork," declared Susan, looking, and feeling quite equal to routing the entire German army single-handed. "No, Sophia Crawford, to tell you the plain truth I am sick and tired of your gloomy predictions. I do not deny that some mistakes have been made. The Germans would never have got back Passchendaele if the Canadians had been left there; and it was bad business trusting to those Portuguese at the Lys River. But that is no reason why you or anyone should go about proclaiming the war is lost. I do not want to quarrel with you, least of all at such a time as this, but our morale must be kept up, and I am going to speak my mind out plainly and tell you that if you cannot keep from such croaking your room is better than your company."

Cousin Sophia marched home in high dudgeon to digest her affront, and did not reappear in Susan's kitchen for many weeks. Perhaps it was just as well, for they were hard weeks, when the Germans continued to strike, now here, now there, and seemingly vital points fell to them at every blow. And one day in early May, when wind and sunshine frolicked in Rainbow Valley and the maple grove was golden-green and the harbour

all blue and dimpled and white-capped, the news came about Jem.

There had been a trench raid on the Canadian front--a little trench raid so insignificant that it was never even mentioned in the dispatches and when it was over Lieutenant James Blythe was reported "wounded and missing."

"I think this is even worse than the news of his death would have been," moaned Rilla through her white lips, that night.

"No--no--'missing' leaves a little hope, Rilla," urged Gertrude Oliver.

"Yes--torturing, agonized hope that keeps you from ever becoming quite resigned to the worst," said Rilla. "Oh, Miss Oliver--must we go for weeks and months--not knowing whether Jem is alive or dead? Perhaps we will never know. I--I cannot bear it--I cannot. Walter--and now Jem. This will kill mother--look at her face, Miss Oliver, and you will see that. And Faith--poor Faith--how can she bear it?"

Gertrude shivered with pain. She looked up at the pictures hanging over Rilla's desk and felt a sudden hatred of Mona Lisa's endless smile.

"Will not even this blot it off your face?" she thought savagely.

But she said gently, "No, it won't kill your mother. She's made of finer mettle than that. Besides, she refuses to believe Jem is dead;

she will cling to hope and we must all do that. Faith, you may be sure, will do it."

"I cannot," moaned Rilla, "Jem was wounded--what chance would he have? Even if the Germans found him--we know how they have treated wounded prisoners. I wish I could hope, Miss Oliver--it would help, I suppose. But hope seems dead in me. I can't hope without some reason for it--and there is no reason."

When Miss Oliver had gone to her own room and Rilla was lying on her bed in the moonlight, praying desperately for a little strength, Susan stepped in like a gaunt shadow and sat down beside her.

"Rilla, dear, do not you worry. Little Jem is not dead."

"Oh, how can you believe that, Susan?"

"Because I know. Listen you to me. When that word came this morning the first thing I thought of was Dog Monday. And tonight, as soon as I got the supper dishes washed and the bread set, I went down to the station. There was Dog Monday, waiting for the train, just as patient as usual. Now, Rilla, dear, that trench raid was four days ago--last Monday--and I said to the station-agent, 'Can you tell me if that dog howled or made any kind of a fuss last Monday night?' He thought it over a bit, and then he said, 'No, he did not.' 'Are you sure?' I said. 'There's more depends on it than you think!' 'Dead sure,' he said. 'I was up all

night last Monday night because my mare was sick, and there was never a sound out of him. I would have heard if there had been, for the stable door was open all the time and his kennel is right across from it!' Now Rilla dear, those were the man's very words. And you know how that poor little dog howled all night after the battle of Courcelette. Yet he did not love Walter as much as he loved Jem. If he mourned for Walter like that, do you suppose he would sleep sound in his kennel the night after Jem had been killed? No, Rilla dear, little Jem is not dead, and that you may tie to. If he were, Dog Monday would have known, just as he knew before, and he would not be still waiting for the trains."

It was absurd--and irrational--and impossible. But Rilla believed it, for all that; and Mrs. Blythe believed it; and the doctor, though he smiled faintly in pretended derision, felt an odd confidence replace his first despair; and foolish and absurd or not, they all plucked up heart and courage to carry on, just because a faithful little dog at the Glen station was still watching with unbroken faith for his master to come home. Common sense might scorn--incredulity might mutter "Mere superstition"--but in their hearts the folk of Ingleside stood by their belief that Dog Monday knew.