

Vandercook Margaret

The Red Cross Girls with Pershing to Victory



Margaret Vandercook

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with Pershing to Victory**

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	19
CHAPTER V	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	23

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CHAPTER I

With The American Army in France

IT was a bright winter day near the middle of November, the ground hard with frost and light flurries of snow in the air.

Over the sloping French countryside thousands of brown tents arose like innumerable, giant anthills, while curling above certain portions of the camp were long columns of smoke. American soldiers were walking about in a leisurely fashion, or standing in groups talking. Some of them were engaged in cleaning their guns or other military accoutrements, a number were investigating their kits.

Near one of the camp fires a private was singing to the accompaniment of a guitar and a banjo played by two other soldiers, with a fairly large crowd surrounding them. "Johnny get your gun, we've the Hun on the run."

Over the entire American camp there was an atmosphere of relaxation, of cheerfulness, of duty accomplished. The eleventh of November having passed, with the armistice signed, the American soldiers in France were now awaiting orders either to return home to the United States or else to march toward the Rhine. In this particular neighborhood of Château-Thierry no word had yet been received as to what units were to form a part of the American Army of Occupation, only the information that the units were to be chosen with regard to their military accomplishments since their arrival in France.

Therefore the heroes of Château-Thierry and of Belleau Woods, of St. Mihiel and the Argonne Forest were ready to accept whatever fate sent, "Home," or "The Watch on the Rhine."

Finally ending his song the singer stood up; he was wearing the uniform of the United States Marines.

"I say don't stop singing, Navara. What's a fellow to do these days without your music, when we have no longer the noise of the cannon or the shrieking of guns overhead as a substitute?" one of the group of soldiers exclaimed. "The quiet has come so suddenly it is almost as hard to grow accustomed to it, as it once was to the infernal racket."

"Oh, Navara is expecting visitors, feminine visitors. Some people have all the luck!" Corporal Donald Hackett protested, placing his banjo in its case and also rising. He spoke with a slight southern drawl and was a tall, fair young fellow with brilliant blue eyes, and both his hair and skin burned red by exposure to the outdoors.

"Come along then and be introduced to my friends; a good many of you fellows know them already," Carlo Navara answered. "Mrs. David Clark and six Red Cross nurses are motoring over from the Red Cross hospital. I suppose you have been told that sometime this afternoon half a dozen of our men are to be cited. An officer is coming from headquarters to represent the commander in chief, and present the medals. In a short time we must be ready for inspection."

Moving off together the two men formed an interesting contrast.

Carlo Navara was dark, a little below medium height, with closely cut brown hair, rather extraordinary black eyes and an olive skin.

The young singer, an American of Italian ancestry, had first fought among the snow-clad hills of Italy. Wounded, he had afterwards returned to the United States, where a great career as a singer was opening before him. Then the desire to fight in France had driven him to surrender his art and to serve as a volunteer in the marine corps.

A moment later the two men disappeared within their tents. An automobile with the Red Cross insignia soon after drove up before one of the entrances to the camp where a sentry stood guard.

Stepping out of it first came a woman, youthful of face and form, but whose hair was nearly white, her eyes a deep blue with dark lashes, and her color a bright crimson from her drive through the winter air.

Following her immediately was a young girl, scarcely eighteen years old, who was small and fair with pale blonde hair and surprisingly dark brown eyes. Both the woman and girl were wearing heavy fur coats and small hats fitting close down over their hair.

The older woman was Mrs. David Clark, the wife of the chief surgeon of the Red Cross hospital which was situated a few miles from the present camp. Before her marriage which had taken place only a little more than six months before, she had been Sonya Valesky.

The young girl was her ward, Bianca Zoli.

"I declare, Sonya, I don't see how you always manage to get ahead of the rest of us considering your advanced years," another girl exclaimed, jumping out of the car and slipping on the icy ground until her older friend caught firm hold of her.

"Do be careful, Nona Davis, and don't be humorous until you are more sure of your footing," Sonya Clark replied. "You know when you return to New York I want Captain Martin to find you as well as when you said goodbye to him. But have you Dr. Clark's note to the officer of the day? I'll ask the sentry to take it in to him."

During the few moments Mrs. Clark and Nona Davis were talking, four other Red Cross nurses had followed their example and were out of the automobile. They were now walking up and down on the frozen road for warmth and exercise.

They were Mildred Thornton and her sister-in-law, Barbara Thornton, who had been doing Red Cross nursing in nearly every one of the allied countries since the outbreak of the great war.

The other two girls had been nursing in France only for the past year.

One of them, Ruth Carroll, was taller than any of her companions and strongly built, with dusky hair and grey eyes set wide apart. Her companion was tiny, with bright red hair, rather nondescript features and a few freckles, in spite of the season of the year, upon her upturned nose. Yet Theodosia Thompson, with her full red lips, her small, even white teeth and her dancing light blue eyes under a fringe of reddish brown lashes, was by no means plain.

"Aren't you praying every moment, Ruth, that we may be ordered forward with the army of occupation into Germany? Personally I shall not be happy until I see with my own eyes the Germans actually tasting the bitterness of defeat. I made a vow to myself that I would not go back home until General Pershing had led our troops to victory, and a real victory means the stars and stripes floating over a portion of the German country."

The older and larger of the two American girls smiled a slow, gentle smile characteristic of her personality and in sharp contrast with her companion's impetuous speech and action.

Both girls were Kentuckians and had been friends for years before sailing to do Red Cross work in France.

"Well, I have never been so fierce a character as you, Thea! To me victory will seem assured the day peace is signed. Yet if any of the divisions of soldiers among whom we have been nursing are ordered to Germany, certainly I hope our Red Cross unit may accompany them. I presume not nearly so many nurses will be needed as in the fighting days, however."

In the interval, while this conversation was taking place, Mrs. Clark's note had been dispatched to the officer of the day. At this moment Major Hersey appeared.

Major James Hersey, confidentially known among his battalion as "Jimmie" had the distinction of being one of the youngest majors in the United States army, and to his own regret was not only less than twenty-five years old but looked even younger.

"I am so awfully glad to see you, Mrs. Clark," he began, blushing furiously without apparent reason, as he spoke, which was an uncomfortable habit.

"I want you to congratulate me. We have just had a telephone message from headquarters saying that we are to form a part of the first big unit of the American army occupational force. We are to begin to move toward Germany at half past five o'clock Sunday morning, and I am tremendously pleased. Our orders are to march two days and rest three and our troops will move on a front of fifty miles for two weeks when we expect to reach the Rhine. But forgive my enthusiasm, Mrs. Clark. You are the first person to whom I have told the good news. Even the men don't know yet. You'll say hurrah with me." Major Hersey ended boyishly, forgetting military etiquette in his enthusiasm. He had a round, youthful face, curly light brown hair and eyes of nearly the same shade.

Later, when Sonya had offered her congratulations, insisting, however, that she was not surprised by the news if military accomplishment had been considered, she and Major Hersey led the way into the American camp in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry followed by the six American girls.

Half an hour afterwards the same information had been disseminated throughout the camp. Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend had also arrived to award the citations and the Distinguished Service Crosses to the officers and soldiers who had merited the distinction.

Never were Sonya Clark and the six Red Cross nurses to forget this, their last picture of an American camp in France before the great movement of the victorious army toward the Rhine.

The clouds of the earlier afternoon had grown heavier and more snow was falling in larger flakes, so that the earth was covered with a thin white carpet.

A cold wind was blowing across the winter fields.

The American soldiers stood in long, even lines, erect, rugged and efficient.

Sonya and her group of Red Cross nurses managed to protect themselves a little from the cold by standing behind a group of officers and near one of the officer's tents, not far from Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend and Major Hersey. They were the only women in the camp at the present time.

Therefore the only feminine applause emanated from them when the first young officer came forward to receive his citation from the hands of the Commanding Officer.

First Lieutenant Leon De Funiak was a young French officer who had been attached to a division of the United States Marines.

In the name of the President he was presented with the Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism in action near St. Mihiel on September 12 when with excellent courage he had captured a machine gun which he turned upon an adjoining trench forcing the enemy occupants to surrender.

The second award was made to Corporal Donald Hackett, a friend of Carlo Navara's and an acquaintance of the Red Cross girls. Later, two citations were given to privates with whom they had no acquaintance.

The afternoon sun was disappearing and the wind growing colder.

Bianca Zoli, who stood between her guardian and Nona Davis, shivered.

Unconscious of what she was doing she also gave a little sigh due to fatigue and cold. Younger than her companions she was also more fragile in appearance.

Her guardian now turned toward her.

"I am sorry, Bianca, you are worn out. I am afraid you should not have come with us. Yet it is impossible to leave now until the citations are over."

At this same moment, another name was being announced by the Commanding Officer. Instantly Bianca Zoli's manner and appearance changed. Her cheeks became a warm crimson, her dark eyes glowed, her lips even trembled slightly although she held the lower one firm with her small white teeth.

The name called was Private Carlo Navara. The Distinguished Service Cross was his award. Early in the previous July he had crossed as a spy into the enemy's lines and there secured information which had proved of extraordinary value to the commander in chief of the allied armies.

Half an hour later, returning to the Red Cross hospital, which lay a few miles behind the American camp, Bianca Zoli sat wrapped in a rug for further warmth, yet her expression had continued radiant. With her pale fair hair blowing from underneath her fur cap, her eyes deep and dark and happy underneath a little fringe of snow which had fallen and clung to her long lashes, she looked oddly pretty.

"Do you think, Sonya, that Carlo knew he was to be cited this afternoon?" she demanded. "He has always said that his own share in the expedition into the German lines last summer was a failure and that the success was entirely due Lieutenant Wainwright, Mildred Thornton's fiancé. Has Carlo spoken to you on the subject recently? Had he been told he was to be decorated?"

A little absently the older woman nodded, at the present moment she was thinking of other matters even more absorbing than Carlo Navara's recent honor, proud as she felt of her friend.

Earlier in the day her husband, Dr. David Clark, the surgeon in charge of the Red Cross hospital, had confided in her that a unit of his nurses and physicians were to follow the American army to the frontiers of Germany. Dr. Clark had also asked his wife's advice with regard to the nurses who had best accompany them. Therefore, all the afternoon, with her subconscious mind Sonya had been endeavoring to meet and unravel this personal problem, at the same time she shared in the interest of the military ceremony to which she had been a witness.

"Yes, I believe Carlo did know what he might expect Bianca," she answered finally. "At least he told me a day or so ago he had received some word that there was to be some public recognition of his deed. I suppose Carlo did not like to discuss the matter generally as he is a more modest soldier than he is an artist."

The younger girl flushed.

"Just the same I should think Carlo might also have confided in me. I wonder if he will ever realize that you are not the best friend he has in the world, even if he does continue to think so."

The older woman smiled without replying.

Sonya knew that some day Bianca would recover from her childish jealous relation between herself and Carlo Navara.

Of late Carlo, himself, had grown entirely sensible, appreciating the fact that her marriage had ended forever his mistaken romantic attachment for a woman so much older than himself, to whose kindness in caring for him during his illness in Italy he believed he owed so much.

Moreover, Sonya's attention was soon engaged in watching the storm. During the past two hours the snow fall had been growing heavier until now it lay thick along the road and was blown into drifts by the roadside. The wind was swirling in fierce gusts and forming whirlwinds of snow in unexpected places. Save for the lights in their motor car the way was nearly dark, as daylight had almost completely disappeared.

Cautiously, although driving his car at a fairly rapid pace, the chauffeur was speeding toward the hospital. Then suddenly without warning he stopped his car so abruptly that its occupants were thrown forward out of their seats.

"What is it, what has happened?" Sonya Clark asked, as soon as she had recovered sufficient breath, then opening the door of the closed car she peered out into the snow-covered road.

A little beyond she was able to see an object lying in the road only a few feet beyond their car.

In the semi-darkness and at the distance, with the snow forming a thick veil between, it was impossible to tell just what the object might be. Partly covered with snow and showing no sign of movement it was probably an animal that had gone astray and been frozen in the November storm.

Quickly Sonya got out of the car followed by Mildred Thornton and Ruth Carroll, the other girls remaining in the automobile at her request.

The chauffeur joined them.

The next moment the four of them were bending over the figure of a young girl, who was wearing a close fitting cap and a long dark blue coat, and sewed on her sleeve a small Red Cross.

Yet when Sonya spoke to her, she showed no sign of being able to reply and made no movement, not even to the raising of her lashes. When the chauffeur lifted and placed her inside the car she still seemed unconscious.

"I think we had best go on to the hospital at once," Sonya commanded. "We are not more than a few moments' journey and whatever should be done for this girl can be better accomplished there."

CHAPTER II

A Late Recruit

A LITTLE before noon the following day, Mrs. David Clark, the wife of the surgeon in command of the Red Cross hospital near Château-Thierry, entered a small room in one of the towers of the old French château, which had been serving as a hospital for the American wounded.

The room was in the portion of the building set apart for the use of the Red Cross nurses.

Opening the door quietly and without knocking, Sonya stood for a moment in silence upon the threshold, staring in polite amazement at the figure she beheld sitting upright in the small hospital bed.

The figure was that of a young girl with straight brown hair cut short and parted at one side, a rather thin white face with a pointed chin and large hazel eyes. There was a boyish, or perhaps more of a sprite-like quality in her appearance. As Sonya looked straightway she saw a fleeting picture of Peter Pan, before the girl turned and spoke to her.

"You are Mrs. Clark aren't you? You are very kind to come to ask about me. I am sorry I gave you so much trouble yesterday; another mile or more and I should have arrived safely at the hospital and been none the worse for my long walk. You won't mind if I go on eating a moment longer, will you? I am dreadfully hungry and I have just succeeded in persuading the charming little girl who is taking care of me that there is nothing in the world the matter with me today, except the need for food. I really feel no worse from yesterday's experience, although it is nice to be so deliciously warm after one has come fairly near being frozen."

As the girl talked, the older woman came and took a little chair beside the bed. The newcomer to the hospital, who had been rescued from the snow storm the afternoon before, Sonya now discovered was not so young as she had originally believed. On closer observation there were tiny lines about the girl's eyes, a little droop at the corners of her mouth, which might, however, be due partly to fatigue and exposure.

"When you feel inclined and if you are strong enough, I wonder if you will not tell me something about yourself and where you were trying to go when we picked you up yesterday? Red Cross nurses have been in many unexpected places since the beginning of the war, yet one scarcely looks to find one lost in the snow in such a picturesque fashion," Sonya suggested half smiling and half serious.

In answer to Sonya's speech, the girl pushed the tray of food which by this time she had finished eating, to the bottom of her bed and sat resting her chin in the palms of her hands. She was leaning forward with her shoulders lifted and wearing a little white flannel dressing sacque which Bianca Zoli must have loaned to her.

"I want very much to explain to you, Mrs. Clark, and I am entirely all right again, only perhaps a little tired from my adventure. I do not seem even to have taken cold. First of all my name is Nora Jamison and I have traveled all the way from California to France, across a country and across an ocean. Was it my good fortune or my ill fortune that I landed in Paris just three days before the armistice was signed to begin my Red Cross nursing? I have been looking forward to the opportunity it seems to me for years. Oh, I have done war nursing, but near one of the California camps."

The girl turned her eyes at this moment to glance out the small window cut into the wall just beside her bed.

They were remarkable eyes, Sonya had already observed, sometimes a light brown in shade, then flecked with green and grey tones. Not in any sense was the rest of the face beautiful, although oddly interesting, the nose long and delicate, the lips thin with slightly irregular white teeth.

"I want to see what this French country is like, Mrs. Clark, see it until I shall never forget its desolation as compared to the fruitfulness and tranquility of our own. Some day when I return home I mean to make some of my own country people share my impression with me."

Then without further explanation of her meaning she turned again to her companion.

"I wonder if you are going to be willing to do me a great favor? Strange, I know, to be asking a favor of some one who has never seen one and knows nothing of one, save that I am already in your debt! I want you to take me with you as one of your Red Cross nurses to work with the army of occupation on the Rhine. Please don't refuse me yet.

"When I arrived in Paris three days before the signing of the armistice I was kept waiting there until the day after the celebration. Then I was told that if I preferred I could stay on in Paris a week or more and go back home, since now that the war was over, there would be less need for Red Cross nurses. Yet somehow I managed to plead my cause and the morning after the armistice I was ordered to report to Dr. Clark at his hospital near Château-Thierry. Probably there would be nurses who were tired and would now wish to be discharged and sent home. I was told that a letter had been written Dr. Clark to expect me. There was a very especial reason why I wished to come to this neighborhood which I would like to tell you later. Well, I had a fairly difficult journey from Paris. I was alone and know almost no French. But there was no one to send with me and even the Red Cross organization relaxed just a little with the prospect of peace. Nevertheless nothing happened to me of any importance until I reached the station where I was told some one would be waiting to drive me to the hospital. There was no one. But the mistake was mine, because I thought an old Frenchman told me the Red Cross hospital was only five miles away. At present, knowing my own failure to understand French I think that he probably said fifteen miles. However, I feel I must have walked nearer fifty, if I may exaggerate the actual facts. I kept asking in my best French to be told the proper direction and thinking I understood and then getting lost. When I started out from the little French station it was early in the morning and really not very cold; you must not think I am altogether without judgment. But now that I am safely here, you will take me with you to Germany? Just think how far I have traveled for this chance! Your other nurses have had their opportunity."

Two bright spots of color were at this moment glowing on the girl's cheeks, her lips and eyes were eager as a child.

Nevertheless Sonya shook her head.

"I am sorry, Miss Jamison, but I'm afraid I can't promise anything. In the first place, my husband has already made the choice of the Red Cross nurses who are to form his unit. He selected his staff of nurses and physicians last night. There is no time for delay. The division of troops we are to serve leaves before dawn Sunday morning. The Red Cross units will bring up the rear. We will probably move later on the same morning. Don't think I am not sympathetic; why you must feel like the last of our American troops who reached Château-Thierry the morning of the armistice. Major Hersey told me it was difficult to keep them from fighting, armistice, or no armistice. But you will be able to remain here at the hospital for a time. We still have a number of the wounded to be cared for and more than half the staff will stay behind."

The new nurse covered her eyes for a moment with her hands, they were beautiful nurse's hands, with long slender, firm fingers.

"Mrs. Clark, I haven't any immediate family, the one person I cared for and to whom I was engaged was killed here in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry at one of the first engagements of the United States troops. We had planned to do wonderful things with our life together after the war was past and he was safely home. Now, I haven't the courage, not for a time anyhow, to go on with what we hoped to do. I must have work, change, movement. I am very strong, see how quickly I have recovered from yesterday. To stay here at the hospital and work now that the war is over would of course be better than going home at once. But the hospital will be sure to close in a little time and the men sent nearer the coast so as to be ready to sail as soon as they are able. May I at least talk to Dr. Clark? Will you ask him to give me a few moments? I shall be dressed in a little while and can come to his office."

Sonya rose up from her chair and stood hesitating a moment.

There was something in the girl's story, something in her face which was oddly wistful and appealing. More than an ordinary loss lay behind her quickly told tragedy.

"Why, yes, I'll speak to Dr. Clark if you desire it and in any case he will wish to know you have recovered. Yet I am afraid I cannot truthfully hold out much hope to you. As a matter of fact I have not personally the least influence with my husband in professional matters. If I had, well I should like to take you with our Red Cross unit to the Rhine," and Sonya stooped, obeying an unusual impulse and kissed the new girl lightly on the forehead before leaving her.

CHAPTER III

Toward Germany

"Happy is he who takes the open road,
From rosy sunburst till the stars ascend.
Light is his heart, though heavy be his load,
If love but waits him at his journey's end."

THE two Red Cross nurses, Theodosia Thompson and Ruth Carroll were standing together at the edge of a bleak field in the dawn of a mid-November morning. Their companion was a young American physician. "What an extraordinary quotation under the present circumstances, Thea! But then, since you are a bundle of contradictions, I presume you suggest that love will await us at our journey's end when you really mean hate. I wonder to what extent the Germans will hate us and how difficult life will be among them when we occupy their cities on the Rhine."

Ruth Carroll, who had begun her speech as an answer to the other girl, now concluded it by turning her gaze upon Dr. Hugh Raymond, who made no effort at the moment to answer so unanswerable a question.

"Oh, I was not thinking of the entrance of our American troops into Germany, but into Belgium and the little devastated French villages which have not seen a friendly face in over four years," Theodosia Thompson replied. "Our soldiers must first pass through the rescued towns. But actually, Ruth, I was not thinking deeply at all. With the knowledge that we were soon to take the open road, the verse came into my mind. Please don't always be so matter of fact."

Possibly the two girls were talking because it is so difficult for girls to remain silent for any length of time even under the most amazing conditions. At this moment, peering steadfastly through the grey light of the approaching day, with Dr. Raymond beside them, they were beholding one of the greatest spectacles in human history, the first movement of the American Army of Occupation toward the Rhine.

In line with the vision of the three watchers at this instant khaki-clad figures were marching slowly forward with their faces turned toward the east. Behind them down the long road ammunition and supply trains were lumbering; cannons and big guns were groaning their way onward as in time of war. But although it was not war, but the vanguard of peace, nevertheless the American soldiers were prepared for war, should the armistice be ended at any moment. Overhead observation balloons were floating, which were to move more rapidly than the army and form a part of the advance guard.

"We are scheduled to enter Virton some time tomorrow, Miss Thompson. Virton is the first town across the Belgian border, then Briey and Longwy and then the little Duchy of Luxemburg. It is a great trek and I am glad to be allowed to join it. Yet somehow I wish we were sending our nurses in dirigibles so as to make the journey more quickly and safely. We have suffered so much from German treachery in the past that I can't quite trust them on this march. Yet personally I wish I could have gone with the soldiers."

The young American doctor spoke slowly and solemnly. He was a tall slender fellow with sandy hair and a rather finely cut face, a little Roman in type. His manner was also slightly dictatorial, as if he were a much older and wiser person than his feminine audience, although he was scarcely twenty-five.

Theodosia Thompson paid no attention to his remarks although he seemed to be addressing her; however Ruth Carroll listened as interestedly as any one could have desired.

Dr. Raymond had not been as friendly with the Red Cross nurses at the Château-Thierry hospital as one might naturally have expected, considering the fact that they had worked and dreamed

and prayed under the same roof during the last thrilling months before the close of the war. But he was supposed not to care for women or girls, either because he was too shy, or because he suffered from an undue sense of superiority. Notwithstanding, he apparently made a mild exception in favor of Ruth Carroll, although for her intimate friend and companion, Thea Thompson, ordinarily he had to make an effort to conceal his dislike.

Over the French country this morning the snow of a few days before had hardened and been beaten down into a frost covered layer of mud, yet the wind had become a little quieter and not so piercingly cold.

"Don't you think we had best go back to the hospital in a few moments, Thea?" Ruth at this instant inquired. "There are still preparations for us to make before our Red Cross unit takes its place in the line of march. As a matter of fact I don't think I slept three hours last night, and neither Dr. Clark nor Mrs. Clark made a pretence of going to bed."

Thea linked her arm in Ruth's.

The young physician who was their companion wore a curious, rapt expression. He was still gazing after the moving army, and seemed not to have heard.

"Goodby, Dr. Raymond." Thea made a little curtsey that was unexpectedly graceful. "Thank you for suggesting to Ruth that she see the first breaking of camp of the American Army of Occupation. I know you had not intended that I accompany you, yet thank you just the same. Never so long as I live shall I forget this daybreak in France! Why, it is as if an old world had ended on the eleventh of November and a new one was beginning today! Besides who knows what experiences may lie ahead, or *romances*, Dr. Raymond. You see now the war has ended, perhaps even you may wake up to other interesting facts in life beside professional ones."

With an odd, challenging expression, Thea Thompson watched the young doctor's face, expecting him at least to change color or show some sign of annoyance. However, as he was a good deal taller than she, he merely looked over her head and toward Ruth Carroll.

"If you will forgive me, Miss Carroll, I won't return with you just this minute. I have nothing very special to look after and I want to see as much of this first movement of our army as possible. Afterwards our Red Cross motors and ambulances will probably have to keep in the rear."

Then the two girls moved away toward the Red Cross hospital choosing their route along a path near the edge of the road, so as not to be in the way of the oncoming trucks.

"I do wish you would try not to talk personalities on a morning like this, Thea dear," Ruth urged gently, "and particularly not to Dr. Raymond. I have told you it makes him uncomfortable. He is really not aware that there is a woman or a girl in the world in any personal fashion. I am sure the very word *romance* irritates him. I presume that is why you used it. Don't get into mischief now that the war is over, Thea, because you may have less hard work when you have been so good all the past year. I feel it specially because I know you did not naturally care for nursing and only began it at first in order to come to France with me. Still you have been very successful and perhaps may wish to keep on with nursing as a profession after we return home?"

A little sound that was neither assent nor refusal followed.

Then Thea Thompson shook her head. "Let's don't discuss either the past or the future just now, Ruth. Thank heaven the present is sufficient! I've an idea that once our soldiers reach the Rhine and settle down they will be needing entertainment as much as they will need nursing. Personally I intend to have a little relief from this long strain and have as good a time as possible. Oh, don't look so shocked, Ruth. I don't intend to do anything especially wicked, play a little perhaps and be a little frivolous. You and I are certainly contrasts as Kentucky girls! You know there may be a chance we may run across a little princess somewhere in hiding and that she may fall in love with one of our American soldiers. American soldiers are greater than kings these days, and princesses are in need of protection. So perhaps I may be a looker-on at some one else's romance and not have one of my own. I have been a looker-on at many things I have wished for myself before today, Ruth, as you know.

But please let us hurry. I promised Mrs. Clark we would not stay away from the hospital but a short time and I wish to keep my word. She does not like me particularly, or at least I seem to puzzle her."

Ruth Carroll shook her head. The girl beside her had not had a happy childhood or young girlhood, so perhaps it was natural that she should wish, as she expressed it, "just to have a good time."

"You puzzle a good many people, Thea, including me and sometimes you even puzzle yourself. But you know I have always believed the good would win in the end. Don't spoil your nursing record. We are very fortunate to have been chosen to form a part of the Red Cross unit to follow the army."

At this moment the grey November clouds parted and a pale rose appeared in the sky.

The two girls were reaching the neighborhood of their Red Cross hospital. Drawn up nearby were half a dozen Red Cross ambulances, an equal number of closed cars and several large trucks for carrying medical supplies.

Moving about and directing the hospital orderlies was Dr. David Clark, the surgeon in command of the hospital. He had been ordered to take charge of the Red Cross unit, who were to follow the division of American troops from the neighborhood of Château-Thierry to the Rhine to assist in policing Germany.

With him at the moment, and aiding in a hundred small ways, was his wife, Sonya Clark.

As the two nurses approached and Dr. Clark caught sight of them, he frowned with disapproval and surprise.

At the instant it seemed impossible to guess what two of his nurses could be doing off duty at daybreak on this morning of all mornings.

Sonya understood and nodded sympathetically.

"You have been to see our troops break camp and start for Germany? I remember you asked permission. I envy you girls the experience, although we shall probably see many extraordinary sights before this day is over. We shall leave in a few hours; naturally it will not take long for us in motor cars, to catch up with the soldiers who are traveling afoot. You will be ready. I hope the sky at present is a good omen of the future."

And Sonya pointed to the rose light overhead.

Later in the day, the Red Cross unit from the hospital in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry took its place in the rear of the line of march of the American Army of Occupation toward Germany.

By this time the sun was shining and the roads had become comparatively clear. Hospital supplies had been sent on ahead with a group of hospital orderlies, Dr. Clark and a corps of his physicians following soon after.

In a later automobile Mrs. Clark had with her half a dozen Red Cross nurses, and in a second Miss Blackstone, the former superintendent of the hospital, an equal number. Also there was a third automobile filled with physicians and orderlies who were to keep as close to the two other cars as circumstances allowed.

Across No Man's land on this November morning, from the northern end of France to the southern, were passing the victorious allied armies, three hundred thousand American troops led by Pershing to victory, and an equal or greater number of French and British.

In the car with Sonya the American girls had but little to say to one another during the first part of their journey. Not only was the land before them desolate beyond description, but filled with tragic memories.

Early in the afternoon, reaching the edge of a little French town, the Red Cross automobiles stopped. The occupants were in no great hurry to move forward. In advance the cavalry had swept on to prepare the way, but the infantry was going ahead slowly and would encamp for the night. This division of the Red Cross intended keeping in the background so that in case the men became ill, they could drop out and be overtaken by nurses and physicians.

The girls were glad of the rest and also extraordinarily hungry, having spent the greater part of the night and every moment since daylight in preparation for the advance.

Their three cars had stopped in front of a small farmhouse on the outskirts of the town.

Approaching the house, Sonya and Dr. Raymond believed it to be empty. The blinds were closed, the pathway to the front door untrodden. Yet it had once been a gay little house of French grey with bright blue shutters.

A knock at the door and both Sonya and the young physician thought they heard scurrying noises inside. Yet knocking again there was no reply.

"Shall I try pushing the little front door open, Mrs. Clark? It is pretty cold eating outside. I can't quite understand the situation. The French people know we are their friends; they have been told to expect nothing but kindness and consideration from us. Do look, already the French civilians are coming out from the village to welcome us. Our little house is surely uninhabited or it would not be so inhospitable."

Following Dr. Raymond's suggestion, Sonya turned.

Standing not far away in a group were the six Red Cross nurses for whom she felt especially responsible, Nona Davis and Mildred Thornton, the two girls who were her intimate and devoted friends and who had made exceptional sacrifices to remain in Europe now that the war was ended. There were also the two comparatively new nurses, Ruth Carroll and Theodosia Thompson, and Bianca Zoli. The sixth girl was the Red Cross nurse, Nora Jamison, who had arrived so late at the hospital. Nevertheless she had been chosen by Dr. Clark to form a member of his Red Cross unit who were to follow the army of occupation.

Beyond them was another group of nurses and physicians.

To Sonya's surprise she saw approaching at this moment from the little French town close by between fifty and a hundred persons. Some of them were old men and women hobbling along on sticks, their faces gaunt and haggard with past suffering, but shining now with happiness. A dozen or more little French girls were marching abreast, one of them carrying a small American flag, another a French. Both flags were evidently home made and must have been carefully hidden from the Germans during their long occupancy of the French village. With them were five or six American soldiers who had been taken prisoners by the Germans and were now being allowed to rejoin their own comrades.

"We haven't a great deal of food, I know," Sonya began impulsively. "But don't you think, Dr. Raymond, we might ask the friends who have come to welcome us and who seem hungriest to share our food? A great quantity of supplies are to follow us and we will probably wait for a few days somewhere along the line of march. Dr. Clark told me he wanted us to be prepared to care for the wounded American soldiers we meet along the way, soldiers who have been imprisoned in Germany and must have suffered untold tortures from improper treatment. Then, if any of our own soldiers are taken ill along the route of march, Dr. Clark is to see they are left in a comfortable hospital with the necessary supplies and it may be we shall be delayed to look after them."

Forgetting her effort to enter the little house, Sonya at this instant moved away from Dr. Raymond to rejoin the other Red Cross nurses.

In French fashion some of the old peasants were kissing the hands of their allies. Miss Blackstone and a physician had already unwound a dirty bandage from the arm of an American soldier and were examining his wound. Sonya had no desire to be left out of the little crowd of French and American friends.

Within fifteen minutes, however, she had again returned to the little house. This time she was accompanied by an old French peasant woman to whom she had explained the situation, inquiring if the farmhouse was in truth uninhabited.

At present it was the French woman who hammered, not gently but with the utmost firmness upon the closed door.

"It may not be possible, madame, that we enter in at the front door," she explained. "It is my impression that la petite Louisa has never once unfastened this door since she opened it to the German soldiers who afterwards took away her mother and older sister. She has been here ever since

all alone, as her father and brother were of course with the army. La petite Louisa has since that time been distraught, not you understand exactly in her right senses, but harmless. It is not that her French neighbors have neglected her. I have myself tried to take her home to be with me, but always she comes back to the little grey house."

The old peasant shrugged her shoulders, as she continued banging on the door and talking at the same time.

"There have been so many things to endure. One more forsaken, half starved child! What would you do? Her family was not well known in our village; they had moved here from Paris a short time before the war and were said to have been wealthy people who had fallen into misfortune. So after a time, it may not seem kind, but life has been too hard some of the days even for kindness, so finally we left the little girl alone. Neighbors have given her food when there was food to give. Even a few of the enemy soldiers have sometimes tried to make friends and persuade her to eat, but always she would rush away from them with the great fear."

Not altogether sure of what the old French peasant was trying to make plain to her, yet convinced enough of the tragedy of the story, Sonya laid her hand on the old woman's arm.

"Don't you think we had best not frighten the little girl then by trying to enter her house. Some one else in the village I feel sure will offer us hospitality. And yet something should be done for the little girl, now the war is past she must be made to understand she need not be afraid," Sonya expostulated.

However, the French woman continued knocking.

She also had been calling out in French, reassuring the little girl inside, pleading with her. "La petite Louisa."

And now Sonya heard footsteps drawing near the closed door. The next moment the door partly opened, disclosing the most pathetic child's figure she had ever seen.

The little girl was perhaps twelve years old and did not look like the usual French child, for though her hair was coal black, her eyes were a violet blue, fringed by the blackest lashes, her skin almost an unearthly pallor. In spite of her look of hunger she was clean and not only scrupulously, but exquisitely dressed in a little silk and serge frock made with care and taste.

The child's eyes were what held Sonya, however, they were at once so terrified and so sad.

Looking past the two women at the crowd outside, she would have fallen except that Sonya's arm went swiftly around her while she tried to explain that they were friends.

Afterwards Sonya and the Red Cross nurses discovered that the little house was furnished very differently from the ordinary French farmhouse, with possessions which must have come from some handsomer home.

In the dining room they ate their luncheon on a French oak table with beautiful carved feet and found that the sideboard and chairs were also of handsome French oak.

The little room soon became crowded, not only with the Red Cross girls and physicians, but with a number of the French people who came in to assist in the celebration. Beyond gifts of chocolate and bread, they refused to accept other food, explaining that the portion of the American army which had passed through their village earlier in the day had given them supplies.

Yet the little French girl in whose home the celebration was taking place would neither eat nor speak to her French acquaintances or to the strange Americans.

Sonya and Miss Blackstone confided to each other their impression that the little girl was probably unable to speak, fright and exhaustion having oftentimes this effect upon highly nervous temperaments.

However, in the midst of the luncheon, suddenly the little French girl slipped over beside the new Red Cross nurse, Nora Jamison, and took tight hold of her hand. She even allowed her to tempt her into eating small morsels of food.

By accident the new nurse was sitting next Sonya Clark and Sonya turned to her, mystified by the little French girl's impetuous action.

"I wonder how you managed that, Miss Jamison?" she inquired. "I have been trying to make friends with our little French hostess ever since my meeting with her and she would have nothing to do with me. You seem not to have noticed her and she has given her confidence to you."

Still holding the little French girl's hand Nora Jamison nodded.

"You will find I am a kind of Pied Piper, Mrs. Clark. I had always nursed children before I began war work and am especially fond of them."

Sonya shook her head.

"It is Peter Pan I thought of when I first saw you. I wonder if you are one of the lucky persons who never grow up? I've an idea you will be a great help to us when we finally reach Germany. We don't want the German children to think of us as ogres and one wonders what stories their parents may now be telling them of our American soldiers."

Then so many things distracted Sonya Clark's attention that she thought no more of the little deserted French girl until she and Bianca looked for her to say goodby and found that the child had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

Luxemburg

IN the afternoon, traveling in the direction of Belgium, there was an unexpected movement under the broad seat of the Red Cross car which startled its occupants.

The first exclamation came from Bianca Zoli who happened to be sitting just over a space where a large box of provisions originally had been stored. The box had been removed, however, and the food eaten at luncheon.

"I am absurd!" Bianca exclaimed, clutching at Nora Jamison's hand, as she was sitting beside her. "But I thought I felt something stir. I wonder if the excitement of our journey is having a strange influence upon me?"

"I don't think so," the older girl returned, "I have been conscious of life, a movement of some kind underneath us ever since we left the little French farmhouse. I say I have been conscious, no, I have not been exactly that, only puzzled and uncomfortable."

Leaning over, Nora at this instant lifted the curtain, and Bianca bending forward at the same time, they both became aware of the figure of the little French girl who had vanished a few moments before their departure from her home.

"Sonya!" Bianca called.

This was scarcely necessary, since by this time every occupant of the car knew equally well what had happened and curiously enough, without discussion, understood the explanation for the child's action.

The little girl had believed that this group of women and girls, wearing the Red Cross of service, were her friends and if possible would protect her from what she feared most in all the world, the grey uniformed German soldiers. Also they were leaving the neighborhood where she had lived under a burden of terror.

Her one desire was to escape from the captured town where the Germans had been in authority so many weary months. As Nora Jamison and Bianca both struggled to assist the child, they found she could scarcely help herself, so stiff had she become from her uncomfortable position.

Yet she managed with their aid to climb up and sit crowded close between Bianca and Nora Jamison.

"What are you going to do with this child, Sonya?" Bianca demanded, more sympathetic than she cared to reveal, remembering her own childhood, which had been more lonely and difficult than any one had ever realized. Not even Sonya, who had come to her rescue in those past days in Italy, more from a combination of circumstance than from any great affection for her, had ever understood.

In response Sonya bit her lips and frowned. There was something about the little French girl which had attracted her strongly at the first sight of her, an attraction she could not have explained, unless it were compassion, and yet she had seen many pathetic, forsaken children during her war work in France.

"I am sure I don't know, Bianca," she replied finally. "I suppose we can leave the child with some French family along our route. However, most of them have responsibilities enough of their own, without our adding a child whose last name we do not even know and who appears unable to tell us anything about herself."

"We cannot take the child back to her own home, even if we could turn back, which is of course out of the question. I would not have the courage to leave the little girl alone there, when she has showed so plainly her wish to escape. Oh, well, life is full enough of problems and some one will surely take the child off our hands! people in adversity are wonderfully kind to one another; our life in France during the war has taught us that much."

Both Sonya and Bianca were speaking English so that the little interloper would not be able to understand what they were saying.

"I wonder why we cannot take 'La petite Louisa' along with us, Sonya? After all one little girl more or less won't matter and we may need her for our mascot in the new work that lies before us. I don't know why I feel the Red Cross nursing with the army of occupation will have new difficulties our former nursing did not have. Perhaps because the soldiers will probably not be seriously ill and are likely to be a great deal more bored," Mildred Thornton urged.

Sonya shook her head.

"Mildred, it is a little embarrassing to have to speak of it, but please remember my husband is something of a martinet in matters of Red Cross discipline. I am afraid he will not think we have the right to add a little girl to our responsibilities. However, the child is with us now not by our choice, and we must make her as comfortable as possible until we have some inspiration concerning her. Miss Jamison, you will look after her, won't you, since she seems to prefer you?"

But already Nora Jamison had assumed that the care of the little French girl had been entrusted to her as a matter of course.

Later, the journey through France and into Belgium and thence into Luxemburg became, not only for the American army but for the Red Cross units which accompanied it, a triumphant procession.

In every little village along their route bells were rung, schools closed while the children and the citizens gathered in the streets to shout their welcome. Through the country at each crossroads groups of men, women and young people were found waiting to express their thankfulness either with smiles or tears.

Thirty-six hours after leaving their hospital near Château-Thierry, Mrs. Clark and her Red Cross workers crossed the frontier of Belgium and entered the little town of Virton.

In Virton, at the Red Cross headquarters, awaiting them they found orders from Dr. David Clark. As promptly as possible they were to proceed to the capital of Luxemburg and there establish a temporary Red Cross hospital. Dr. Hugh Raymond was to take charge with Miss Blackstone as superintendent, the Red Cross nurses assuming their usual duties. Before their arrival arrangements for their reception would have been made and a house secured for their temporary hospital.

This was necessary since along the route of march numbers of soldiers were being attacked by influenza and must be cared for. Ordinary hospitals were already overcrowded with wounded American soldiers who had been prisoners in Germany.

Therefore, obeying orders, this particular Red Cross unit entered Luxemburg a few hours before the arrival of General Pershing at the head of his victorious troops.

It was early morning when the Red Cross girls drove into the little duchy, which has occasioned Europe trouble out of all proportion to its size. Actually the duchy of Luxemburg is only nine hundred and ninety-nine square miles and has a population of three hundred thousand persons.

Just as surely as Germany tore up her treaty with Belgium as a "scrap of paper," when at the outbreak of the war it suited her convenience, as surely had she marched her army across Luxemburg in spite of the protest of its young Grand Duchess Marie Adelaide.

However, when Germany continued to use Luxemburg as an occupied province, the Grand Duchess was supposed to have changed her policy and to have become a German ally.

On the morning when the American Red Cross entered her capital, the grey swarm of German soldiers was hurrying rapidly homeward, broken and defeated, while the American army under General Pershing was hourly expected.

To make way for the more important reception and to give as little trouble as possible, the American Red Cross drove directly to the house which had been set apart for their use. The house proved to be a large, old fashioned place with wide windows and a broad veranda, and on the principal street of the city not far from the Grand Ducal Palace.

After a few hours of intensive work toward transforming a one-time private residence into a temporary hospital, the entire staff deserted their labors to gather on the broad veranda.

The news had reached them that General Pershing had entered the capital city of Luxemburg and would pass their headquarters on his way to the Grand Ducal Palace for his formal reception by the Grand Duchess.

Later a portion of the American army itself marched by.

From their balcony the American girls could see the stars and stripes mingling with the red, white and blue of the small principality.

Never in their past experience had they seen a welcome to equal the welcome given by the citizens of Luxemburg to the troops which General Pershing had led to victory. If the Grand Ducal family had been won over to the German cause, how deeply the people of Luxemburg had sympathized with the allies was proved by this single day's greeting.

Together with the people in the streets the Red Cross workers found they were shouting themselves hoarse. Yet the shouts were barely heard amid the blowing of whistles, the ringing of bells.

In the hearts of the inhabitants of the tiny duchy apparently there was a great love for the soldiers of the greatest democracy in the world.

From every window along their route of march flowers rained down upon the soldiers, children crowding close presented each American doughboy with a bunch of chrysanthemums; one of them carried a banner on which was inscribed, "The Day of Glory has Arrived."

Turning to speak to Mildred Thornton who stood beside her, Nona Davis found to her surprise that her cheeks were wet with tears. She had not been conscious of them until this instant.

"It pays almost, doesn't it, Mildred, for all the suffering we have witnessed in Europe in the past four years to see the rejoicing of the little nations of Europe over the victory of democracy? Even if the little Grand Duchess is pro-German in sentiment, it is plain enough that her people must have loathed the German occupation of their country. I would not be surprised if the passing of our soldiers may not mean a change of government in Luxemburg. Under the circumstances I wonder how long our Red Cross unit may remain?"

Mildred Thornton shook her head.

"Impossible to guess of course, Nona. And yet I am glad of the opportunity. We shall have nursed in one more country in Europe and perhaps even little Luxemburg will offer us new experiences and new friends."

CHAPTER V

Shoals

DURING the thirty odd years of her life, Sonya Valesky, now Mrs. David Clark, had been through many and varied adventures; some of them, in her young womanhood in Russia, had been tragic, others merely difficult. But after a few days in Luxemburg, amid the effort to establish the temporary Red Cross hospital, Sonya believed that she had rarely suffered a more trying interlude.

It was not the actual work of the hospital arrangements or the care of the sick. Of the first Miss Blackstone took charge and she was eminently capable; for the second Dr. Hugh Raymond was responsible. Both of them had able assistants. The upper part of the house was set apart for the care of the officers and soldiers suffering from influenza, and there were about twenty cases; the second floor was reserved as sleeping quarters for the staff with a few extra rooms for patients who were ill and in need of attention from other causes so they should not be exposed to contagion. On the lower floor was a reception room, dining room and kitchen, with the drawing room for convalescents.

But as usual Sonya Clark's task was looking after the Red Cross nurses, seeing not only that they were in good health, but as happy and contented as possible, giving their best service and in little danger of breakers ahead.

Nevertheless, within forty-eight hours after the passing of the American troops through Luxemburg, it appeared to Sonya that some unexpected change had taken place in her group of Red Cross nurses.

What they were actually ordered to do they did in a fairly dutiful fashion, but the old enthusiasm, the old passionate desire for service had vanished. Among the entire group of nurses a relaxation of discipline had taken place. The excitement of their journey, the knowledge that the war had ended in the allied victory, a natural desire for pleasure after so long a strain, apparently possessed them alike, except Nora Jamison who was comparatively new to the work, and seemed in every way an unusual girl.

Frankly Bianca Zoli confessed to Sonya, not long after their arrival in Luxemburg, that she was weary of the endless waiting upon the nurses and patients and needed a short rest. And Sonya agreed that this was true. Bianca was younger than any member of their Red Cross unit and had been faithful and untiring in her devotion for many months during the final allied struggle for victory. Moreover, Bianca also appeared slightly depressed and Sonya wisely guessed this was partly due to the long separation from Carlo Navara, which Bianca must see was inevitable. With his regiment Carlo was moving toward the Rhine and nothing was apt to be less in his mind for the time being than his friendship for the young girl whom he undoubtedly regarded only in a semi-brotherly spirit composed of indifference and affection.

Since the greater part of the nursing at the temporary hospital in Luxemburg was the care of the soldiers who were ill with influenza, and feeling that Bianca was not altogether in the right state of health to battle with the contagion, Sonya requested Miss Blackstone to permit her to have a half holiday, doing no work that was not voluntary.

But with Nona Davis and Mildred Thornton, the two Red Cross nurses who had given the most valuable personal service, since the outbreak of the war, the situation was more serious and far more difficult to meet.

They did not neglect their duties, this would have been impossible to either of them, and yet in a way it was plain that they were no longer wholly absorbed by them and to use an old expression, their hearts were no longer in what they were doing.

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