

you go on like a passionate child because, busy as they are, they are obliged to adhere to their regulations. At any rate I will come here with you no more. I am not going to see these kind people insulted."

CHAPTER XV.

MARY BRANDER made her way wearily home.

"You have had another terrible time, I can see it in your face," Madame Michaud said, as she entered. "They say there have been four thousand wounded and fifteen hundred killed. I cannot understand how you support such scenes."

"It has been a hard time," Mary said; "I will go up to my room at once, madame. I am worn out."

"Do so, my dear. I will send you in a basin of broth."

Without even taking her bonnet off Mary dropped into a chair when she entered her room and sat there till Margot brought in the broth.

"I don't think I can take it, thank you, Margot."

"But you must take it, mademoiselle," the servant said, sturdily; "but wait a moment, let me take off your bonnet and brush your hair. There is nothing like having your hair brushed when you are tired."

Passively Mary submitted to the woman's ministrations, and presently felt soothed, as Margot with, by no means ungentle hands, brushed steadily the long hair she had let down.

"You feel better, mademoiselle?" the woman asked, presently. "That is right, now take a little of this broth. Please try, and then I will take off your cloak and frock and you shall lie down, and I will cover you up."

Mary made an effort to drink the broth, then the servant partly undressed her and covered her up warmly with blankets, drew the curtains across the window and left her with the words. "Sleep well, mademoiselle."

But for a time Mary felt utterly unable to sleep. She was too worn out for that relief. It had been a terrible time for her.

For twenty-four hours she had been engaged unceasingly in work of the most trying description. The scent of blood still seemed to hang about her, and she vaguely wondered whether she should ever get rid of it. Then there had been her own special anxiety and suspense, and the agony of seeing Cuthbert brought in apparently wounded to death. The last blow had been dealt by this woman. She said she was his fiancée, but although she had it from her lips, Mary could not believe it. She might be his mistress but surely not the other. Surely he could never make that wild passionate woman his wife. Then she felt she was unjust. This poor creature would naturally be in a passion of grief and agony, at finding that she could not go to the bedside of the man she loved. She should not judge her from that. She remembered how different was her expression in some of the sketches she had seen in Cuthbert's book.

"At any rate," she said to herself with a hard sob, "I have no right to complain. He told me he loved me and I was almost indignant at the idea, and told him he was not worthy of my love. There was an end of it. He was free to do as he liked, and of course put it out of his mind altogether as I did out of mine. How could I tell that the time would come when I should find out what a terrible mistake I had made, how could I dream of such a thing! How could I guess that he would come into my life again and that he would have the power to spoil it! What a fool, I have been. What a conceited, silly fool," and so Mary Brander's thoughts ran on till they become more and more vague, and sleep at last arrested them altogether. She was awakened by Madame Michaud coming into the room with a cup of coffee.

"Well, my child, have you slept well?"

"Have I slept, madame? It cannot have been for more than a minute or two." She looked round in surprise. "Why, it is broad daylight, what time is it?"

"It is eleven o'clock, my dear. I thought it was time to arouse you, and in truth I was getting anxious that you had not made your appearance. It is seventeen hours since you lay down."

"Good gracious!" Mary exclaimed. "And I was due at the ambulance at eight. I must have been asleep hours and hours, madame. I lay awake for a time—two hours, perhaps, and the last thing I thought was that I should never get to sleep, and then I have slept all this dreadful time."

"Not a dreadful time at all," Madame Michaud said with a smile. "You have not slept a minute too long. I feared for you when you came in yesterday. I said to my husband in the evening, 'That angel is killing herself. She could scarce speak when she came in, and I cry when I think of her face.' You may thank the good God that you have slept so long and so soundly. I can tell you that you look a different being this morning."

"I feel different," Mary said, as she sprang up, "will you ask Margot to bring me my can of water at once."

"Yes, but drink your coffee and eat your bread first. Margot said you only took a few spoonfuls of broth last night."

"I must have my bath first and then I will promise you I will drink the coffee and eat the last crumb of bread. You will see I shall be quite blooming by the time I come down."

Madame Michaud was obliged to admit that Mary looked more herself than she had done for days past when, half an hour later, she came downstairs ready to start.

"I shall be scolded dreadfully, madame, when I get to the ambulance four hours after my time."

"You look so much fitter for work, my dear, that if the doctor has eyes in his head, he will be well content that you have taken it out in sleep."

Mary walked with a brisk step down to the hospital.

"I will think no more of it," she said resolutely to herself. "I have chosen to be a nurse and I will go through with it. I think when I get home after this is over I will become a nursing sister—at any rate I may do some good at that; there is plenty of work in the world, even if it is not in the way I thought of doing it."

But she hesitated when she reached the tents, afraid to go in. One of the other nurses came out presently.

"Which tent is Dr. Swinburne in?" she asked.

"In this," she said, "I was just speaking to him."

"Would you mind going in again and asking him to come out. I am dreadfully late this morning and I should like to see him before I go in."

A minute later the surgeon came out.

"What is it, Miss Brander?" he said, kindly. "I missed you this morning, and hoped you were taking a good sleep."

"That was just it, Doctor, and I do feel so ashamed of myself. They thought I looked tired, when I came in, and were silly enough not to wake me this morning."

"Not silly at all, my dear. They did the very best thing for you, for you had gone through a terrible strain here. I am glad, indeed, it was sleep and not illness that kept you away. You are looking quite a different woman this morning."

"I am so glad that you are not angry. Please tell me how the wounded are getting on?"

"There were ten deaths in the night," he said, "but as a whole they are going on well. You will be glad to hear that the young Englishman who was shot through the body has passed a quiet night, and I have now an almost assured hope that he will recover. Had there been any vital injury its effects would be visible by now. Now run in and take up your work."

With a grateful look Mary entered the tent and was soon engaged at her work. She was some little time before she made her way to the farther end of the tent. Then she went quietly up to Cuthbert's bedside.

"I have just had good news of you, Cuthbert. The doctor says he has the strongest hopes now of your recovery."

"Yes, he has been telling me that I am doing well," he said. "Have you only just come? I have been wondering what had become of you. You looked so pale, yesterday, that I was afraid you might be ill."

"I have been sleeping like a top," she said, "for I should be ashamed to say how many hours. Of course I ought to have been here at eight, but they did not wake me, and I feel all the better for it."

"I remember not so long ago," he said, "that a certain young lady declared that it was ridiculous for persons to interfere in business which did not concern them. Now here you are knocking yourself up and going through horrible work for people who are nothing to you. That is a little inconsistent."

"I do not argue with people who cannot speak above a whisper," she said. "Another time I shall be able to prove to you that there is nothing inconsistent whatever in it. Well, thank God that you are better, Cuthbert. I should not have gone away yesterday afternoon if Dr. Swinburne had not assured me that there was nothing that I could do for you, and that he really thought you might recover. You believe me, don't you?"

He nodded.

"I do believe you, Mary. I did not think myself that I had a shadow of a chance, but this morning I began to fancy that the doctor may be right, and that I may possibly live to be a shining light among artists."

"Did you sleep at all?" she asked.

"Yes, I have been dozing on and off ever since you went away. I have drunk a good deal of brandy and water and I really think I could take some broth. I told the doctor so this morning, but he said I had better wait another twelve hours, and then I might have two or three spoonsful of arrowroot, but the less the better. I suppose there is no list of killed and wounded published yet. I should like to know who had gone. They were good fellows, every one of them."

"I don't know, Cuthbert, but I should hardly think so. I think Madame Michaud would have told me had there been a list published this morning."

Mary now turned to the next bed, but the patient was lying with his eyes closed.

"I expect he has gone off to sleep," Cuthbert said, "he has been in a lot of pain all night and half an hour ago they took off his bandages and put on fresh ones, and I fancy they must have hurt him amazingly. I could tell that by his quick breathing, for he did not utter a moan. I am glad that he has gone off

to sleep. I heard the doctor tell him that he thought he might get the use of his arm again, though it would probably be stiff for some time."

"You must not talk, indeed you mustn't," she said, facing round again. "I am sure the doctor must have told you to keep perfectly quiet. If you are quiet and good, I will come to you very often, but if not I shall hand you over to the charge of another nurse. I blame myself for asking you any questions. Indeed I am quite in earnest; you are not fit to talk; the slightest movement might possibly set your wound off bleeding; besides you are not strong enough; it is an effort to you, and the great thing is for you to be perfectly quiet and tranquil. Now shut your eyes and try to doze off again."

She spoke in a tone of nursely authority, and with a faint smile he obeyed her orders. She stood for a minute looking at him, and as she did so her eyes filled with tears at the change that a few days had made, and yet her experience taught her that it would be far greater before long. As yet weakness and fever, and pain, had scarcely begun their work of hollowing the cheeks and reducing him to a shadow of himself. There was already scarcely a tinge of color in his face, while there was a drawn look round the mouth and a bluish tinge on the lips. The eyes seemed deeper in the head and the expression of the face greatly changed—indeed, it was rather the lack of any expression that characterized it. It might have been a waxen mask.

From time to time she went back to him, and although the soft clinging material of her dress and her list slippers rendered her movements noiseless, he always seemed conscious of her presence, and opened his eyes with a little welcoming smile, as she stood beside him, sipped a few drops from the glass she held to his lips, and then closed his eyes again without a word. After a few hours the period of pain and fever set in, but the doctor found no reason for anxiety.

"You must expect it, my dear," he said to Mary one day when the fever was at its height. "A man cannot get through such a wound as his without a sharp struggle. Nature cannot

be outraged with impunity. It is certain now that there was no vital injury, but pain and fever almost necessarily accompany the efforts of nature to repair damages. I see no reason for uneasiness at present. I should say that he has an excellent constitution, and has never played the fool with it. In a few days in all probability the fever will abate, and as soon as it does so, he will be on the highway to convalescence."

During that ten days Mary seldom left the hospital, only snatching a few hours, sleep occasionally in a tent which had now been erected for the use of the nurses on duty. At the end of that time the struggle was over and the victory won, and Cuthbert lay terribly weak and a mere shadow of himself, but free from fever and with perfect consciousness in his eyes.

"How long have I been here?" he asked Mary.

"I think it is a fortnight to-day since you came in, Cuthbert," she answered, quietly. "Thank God you are quite out of danger now, and the doctor says all we have got to do is to build you up."

"You have had a hard time of it, child," he said; "though I knew nothing else, I seemed to be conscious that you were always near me."

"I have had plenty of sleep, Cuthbert, and am perfectly well," she said, cheerfully.

"Then your look belies you," he said, "but I know that it is no use arguing. What has been happening outside?"

"Nothing. The troops were withdrawn the day after the fight when you were wounded, and nothing has been done since."

"How is Dampierre getting on?" he asked.

"He is getting on well, I believe," she replied. "He was delirious and so restless, and talked so loud that the doctor had him carried into another ward so that you should not be disturbed by it. I have not seen him since, but I hear he is going on very well. Your friend René has been here twice—indeed he has been every day to inquire—but he was only let in twice. He seems a very kind-hearted fellow and was very cut up about you. I am sure he is very fond of you. He says that Monsieur Goudé and the other students have all been

most anxious about you, and that he comes as a sort of deputation from them all."

René had, indeed, quite won Mary's heart by the enthusiastic way in which he had spoken of Cuthbert, and had quite looked forward to the little chat she had with him every morning when he came to the ambulance for news.

"He is a grand fellow, mademoiselle," he would say, with tears in his eyes, "we all love him. He has such talents and such a great heart. It is not till now that we quite know him. When a man is dying men speak of things they would not tell otherwise. There are four or five that he has helped, and who but for him must have given up their studies. The rest of us had no idea of it. But when they knew how bad he was, first one broke down and then another, and each told how generously he had come to their aid and how delicately he had insisted upon helping them, making them promise to say no word of it to others. *Ma foi*, we all cried together. We have lost six of our number besides the five here. The rest, except Dampierre, are our countrymen, and yet it is of your Englishman that we think and talk most."

All this was very pleasant to Mary. Cuthbert was now of course nothing to her, but it soothed her to hear his praises. He had been wicked in one respect, but in all others he seemed to have been what she had thought of him when he was a child, save that he developed a talent and the power of steady work, for which she had never given him credit, for on this head René was as emphatic as on other points.

"He will be a great artist, mademoiselle, if he lives. You do not know how much the master thought of him and so did we all. He worked harder than any of us, much harder; but it was not that only. He has talent, great talent, while the rest of us are but daubers. You will see his pictures hung on the line and that before long. We are all burning to see those he was painting for the Salon this year. There are only three of us painting for that, the master would not let any others think of it. Pierre Leroux, is the third and he would have had little chance of being hung had not the Englishman gone into his

room one day, and taking his brush from his hand transformed his picture altogether—transformed it, mademoiselle—and even Goudé says now that it is good and will win a place. But Pierre declares that he has not the heart to finish it. If Cuthbert dies he will put it by for another year.”

René was admitted to see Cuthbert the day after the fever had left him and sat for an hour by his bedside telling, after his first burst of emotion on seeing the change that had taken place in him, about the fate of his comrades in the studio. Mary did not go near them. There were questions Cuthbert would want to ask. Messages that he would want to send that she ought not to hear. She had wondered that this woman, who had for a time come every day and had as regularly made a scene at the entrance to the ambulance, had, since Cuthbert was at his worst, ceased coming.

She had never asked about her, and was ignorant that for the last four days she had been allowed to sit for a time by the side of a patient in another ward. She thought most likely that she was ill and had broken down under the stress of her grief and anxiety. She had even in thought pitied her. It was she and not herself that ought to be watching Cuthbert's bedside. She might not be good, but she was a woman and she loved, and it must be terrible for her to know how ill he was, and never to be allowed even to see him for a moment. It was evident that she had been taken ill, and when on René's leaving she went to her patient she expected to find him downcast and anxious. Sad he certainly was, but he did not seem to her restless or excited as she had expected.

“I have been hearing of the others,” he said. “Six of them are gone, all merry lads, taking life easily, as students do, but with plenty of good in them, that would have come to the surface later on. It will make a sad gap in our ranks when the rest of us come together again. The wounded are all going on well, I hear, that of course is a great comfort. I hear the other two companies suffered much more than we did. The walls we fought behind saved us a good deal you see. René says the troops all went out again three days ago, and that there was a talk of

a great fight, but there has only been some skirmishing and they have begun to come back into the town again. Our corps did not go out. They think they have done a fair share of the work, and I think so too. René says the old major, who is now in command, is so furious at the cowardice shown last time by the National Guards and some of the troops that he declares he will not take out his brave lads to throw away their lives when the Parisians will not venture within musket-shot of the enemy.

“I think he is quite right. I hope there will be no more sorties, for I am sure it would be useless. If you had seen, as I did, seven or eight thousand men running like a flock of frightened sheep, you would agree with me that it would be hopeless to think of breaking through the Germans with such troops as this. One victory would make all the difference in the world to their morale, but they will never win that one victory, and it will take years before the French soldier regains his old confidence in himself. Have you taken to rats yet, Mary?” he asked, with a flash of his old manner.

“No, sir, and do not mean to. We are still going on very fairly. The meat rations are very small, but we boil them down into broth, and as we have plenty of bread to sop into it we do very well; our store of eggs have held on until now. We have been having them beaten up in our morning coffee instead of milk, but they are just gone, and Madame Michaud says that we must now begin upon the preserved meat. We are a long way from rats yet, though I believe they are really hunted and eaten in great numbers in the poorer quarters.”

“And there is no talk of surrender?”

“No talk at all; they say we can hold on for another month yet.”

“What is the news from the provinces?”

“Everywhere bad. Bourbaki has been obliged to take refuge in Switzerland and his force has been disarmed there. Chanzy has been beaten badly near New Orleans, and the Prussians have probably by this time entered Tours. Faidherbe has gained some successes in the north, but as the Germans

are pushing forward there, as well as everywhere else, that does not make very much difference to us."

"Then what on earth's the use of holding out any longer," he said. "It is sheer stupidity. I suppose the Parisians think that, as they can't fight, they will at least show that they can starve. What is the weather like? I felt very cold last night though I had plenty of blankets on."

"It is terribly cold," she said. "The snow is deep on the ground—it is one of the coldest winters that has been for years."

"What is the day of the month?"

"The 26th."

"Then yesterday was Christmas Day."

"Yes," she said, "not a merry Christmas this year to any of us—no roast beef, no plum-pudding, no mince-pies—and yet, Cuthbert, I had every reason to be thankful, for what a much more unhappy Christmas it might have been to me."

He nodded.

"I know what you mean. Yes, you would have missed me, child, cut off as we are from the world here. I am, as it were, the sole representative of your family. Of course, you have not heard from them."

She shook her head.

"I don't suppose they trouble much about me," she said, a little bitterly, "I am a sort of disappointment, you know. Of course I have been away now for nearly two years, except for the fortnight I was over there, and even before that I scarcely seemed to belong to them. I did not care for the things that they thought a great deal of, and they had no interest in the things I cared for. Somehow I don't think I have got on well with them ever since I went up to Girton. I see now it was entirely my own fault. It does not do for a girl to have tastes differing from those of her family."

"I felt that, Mary. I felt it very much. I have told myself ever since the day of dear old father's death that I have been a brute, and I wish with all my heart I had put aside my own whims and gone in for a country life. It is all very well

to say I did not like it, but I ought to have made myself like it; or if I could not do that, I ought to have made a pretence of liking it, and to have stuck to him as long as I lived. I hadn't even the excuse of having any high purpose before me."

"We all make mistakes in our lives, Cuthbert," the girl said, quietly, "and it is of no use bemoaning them—at any rate you have done your best to retrieve yours, and I mean to do my best to retrieve mine. I have quite made up my mind that when this is over I shall go to London and be regularly trained as a hospital nurse, and then join a nursing sisterhood."

"What! and give up woman in general?" Cuthbert said, with a faint laugh. "Will you abandon your down-trodden sisters? Impossible, Mary."

"It is quite possible," she said, in a business-like manner.

"Become a back-slider! Mary, you absolutely shock me. At present you have got nursing on the brain. I should have thought that this ambulance work would have been enough for a life-time. At any rate I should advise you to think it over very seriously before you commit yourself too deeply to this new fad. Nursing is one of the greatest gifts of women, but after all woman wasn't made only to nurse, any more than she was to devote her life to championing her sex."

Mary did not reply but silently moved off with an air of deeply-offended dignity.

"What an enthusiastic little woman she is," Cuthbert laughed quietly to himself; "anyhow she is a splendid nurse, and I would infinitely rather see her so, than as a female spouter on platforms. I fancied the siege might have had some effect on her. She has seen something of the realities of life and was likely to give up theorizing. She looks older and more womanly, softer a good deal than she was. I think I can improve that picture now. I had never seen her look soft before, and had to trust to my imagination. I am sure I can improve it now."

Another fortnight and Cuthbert was out of bed and able to walk about in the ward and to render little services to other patients.

"Do you know, Mary," he said, one day, when she happened to be idle and was standing talking to him as he sat on the edge of his bed, "a curious thing happened to me the very day before we went out on that sortie. I saw that fellow, Cumming, the rascal that ruined the bank, and then bolted, you know. For a moment I did not recall his face, but it struck me directly afterwards. I saw him go into a house. He has grown a beard, and he is evidently living as a quiet and respected British resident. It was a capital idea of his, for he is as safe here as he would be if he were up in a balloon. I intended to look him up when I got back again into Paris, but you see circumstances prevented my doing so."

"Of course you will get him arrested as soon as the siege is over, Cuthbert. I am very glad that he is found."

"Well, I don't know that I had quite made up my mind about that. I don't suppose that he made off with any great sum. You see the companies he bolstered up with the bank's money, all smashed at the same time. I don't suppose that he intended to rob the bank at the time he helped them. Probably he had sunk all his savings in them, and thought they would pull round with the aid of additional capital. As far as I could make out, from the report of the men who went into the matter, he did not seem to have drawn any money at all on his own account, until the very day he bolted, when he took the eight or ten thousand pounds there was in the safe. No. I don't think I meant to hand him over or indeed to say anything about it. I thought I would give him a good fright, which he richly deserves, and then ask him a few questions. I have never quite understood how it was that dear old dad came to buy those shares. I did inquire so far as to find out it was Cumming himself who transferred them to him, and I should really like to hear what was said at the time. If the man can prove to me that when he sold them he did not know that the bank was going to break, I should have no ill-will against him, but if I were sure he persuaded him to buy, knowing that ruin would follow, I would hunt him down and spare no pains to get him punished."

"Why should he have persuaded your father to buy those shares?"

"That's just what I cannot make out. He could have had no interest in involving him in the smash. Besides they were not on intimate terms in any way. I cannot imagine that my father would have gone to him for advice in reference to business investments. It was, of course, to your father he would have turned in such matters."

"How long had he been a shareholder?"

"He bought the shares only two months before his death, which makes the matter all the more singular."

"What did father say, Cuthbert?" the girl said, after a short pause. "I suppose you spoke to him about it."

"He said that my father had heard some rumors to the effect that the bank was not in a good state, and having no belief whatever in them, he bought the shares, thinking that his doing so would have a good effect upon its credit, in which as a sort of county institution, he felt an interest."

"But did not father, who was solicitor to the bank, and must have known something of its affairs, warn him of the danger that he was running?"

"That is what I asked him myself, but he said that he only attended to its legal business, and outside that knew nothing of its affairs."

"It seems a curious affair altogether," Mary said, gravely. "But it is time for me to be at work again."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

WHILE in the ambulance, Mary Brander resolutely put her conversation with Cuthbert aside, but as soon as she started for her walk home, it became uppermost in her thoughts. It was certainly a curious affair. From time to time friends at home with whom she corresponded, sent her local newspapers, and this had especially been the case during the first few