

Chapter One

Anna glanced at her watch for the umpteenth time and sighed. She had arrived at the station far too early and now the train was late. An icy breeze gusted down the platform and her skirt flapped madly about her calves as she backed into the waiting room doorway. When she had first worn her new London bought outfit the villagers of Bryn-y-Gwynt had gaped at her as if she were walking about naked. Showing off her ankles and legs to all and sundry, the conservatively minded villagers had shaken their heads. Had she no shame?

"Shouldn't be long now, Mrs Brett!" Bryce, the stationmaster, called to her.

She nodded, feeling strangely nervous. Why? Richard was her husband, not a...she was about to think, a complete stranger. The following month would bring their fifth wedding anniversary but how much time had they actually spent together?

They had married in February of 1914 when little or no one had heard of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Or Sarajevo. Or Serbia. Eight short months of wedded bliss later, she smiled, it had been bliss, Britain was at war and Richard had immediately volunteered for the Royal Army Medical Corps.

During the war she had seen him all of five times. It should have been seven but his letters had been delayed and she had arrived at his parents home in London, hoping desperately that she was not too late, only to find that she was, he had been called back to France early. She still felt the acute disappointment. When it had happened a second time it had almost been too much and she had cried for days, convinced that she would never see him again. Because of it she now had not seen him for over a year, hence her nerves.

"It will be good to have the doctor back." Bryce stood in the doorway beside her. "Your Tad will be able to really retire now. Though, I'd say the work was good for him since young Huw..."

"It was," she agreed quietly.

It was still hard to believe that Huw would never be coming home. He, along with thousands of others, had been mown down by German machine guns on the Somme in July 1916. He had been only nineteen years old.

Anna saw the steam long before she heard the train and waited a further age before it finally stopped at the short platform. She quickly scanned the carriages before she saw a door about halfway down the train open slowly. She ran along to meet him.

Richard put his case down, slammed the door, and then turned to face her. Her eyes moved over his now gaunt face. He looked older, weary, was badly in need of a shave and his once twinkling blue eyes were now a dirty grey and held a blankness, which induced a sudden sharp pain in the pit of her stomach.

"Home at last!" She forced a bright smile.

"You've cut your hair." He lifted a hand to her now shoulder-length curls.

"It's the new fashion and far more practical. Remember how long it used to take to dry!"

"I liked it long."

"Well, it's still quite long. The stylist wanted to cut it even shorter but I wouldn't let her."

"Skirts are getting shorter, too. I noticed it in London."

"How are your parents?"

"Fine." He raised his eyes from her legs and rested them on her face.

Is he going to kiss me, or should I kiss him, she wondered, never having felt this awkward with him before.

"Anna?" he whispered. "Kiss me?"

She moved forward and lightly kissed his lips.

"Properly, Anna."

"Here?" She quickly looked about for Bryce.

"Anna!" He clasped her face and kissed her passionately, far too passionately for an open platform with a curious stationmaster looking on. His hands slid down her body and began to caress her breasts.

"Stop it, Richard!" she hissed and broke away, smoothing down her clothes and righting her hat, which he had knocked askew. "Let's go home."

He nodded, doing nothing to mask his hurt expression. She took his arm and tried to quickly lead him off the platform but Bryce was determined to have his say.

"Welcome home, Dr Brett!" He shook Richard's hand warmly. "So good to have you back!"

"Thank you, Mr Bryce," he replied simply and they walked on.

Out on the road he stopped abruptly and stared at the car, a year-old Model T Ford.

"Well, what do you think?" she smiled. "First motorcar in Bryn-y-Gwynt! I am so glad you agreed that I should go ahead and buy it! Everyone stops and stares at Tad and me in it! We're famous!"

"It will make a great difference," he said and put his case in the back before getting into the passenger seat.

He sat quietly, making no comment on her driving as they sped along the narrow roads. She watched his face at one point as his eyes beheld Snowdon for the first time in four and a half years. Draped in snow and rising dramatically into the clouds, she expected him to smile or at least sigh contentedly, knowing his love for the beautiful mountain. Instead, he frowned and she forgot to turn away as he glanced at her.

"It's all the same. The mountains and..." He looked about him as the car reached the village, stretching from halfway to just over the brow of the windy hill, which gave the village its name. Bryn-y-Gwynt was beautiful in summer, in winter, too, but terribly exposed. "...The village. This compared to France...no," he corrected himself, shaking his head. "There is no comparison. This is heaven. France was hell. Flat. No trees left. Mud. So much bloody mud..."

"Dr Brett! Croeso! Welcome back!" Will Edwards, the village grocer, stood at the door of his shop and waved as they passed.

Richard didn't reply. He simply lifted his hand in acknowledgement.

Their house stood at the end of the village, half way down the hill, affording them stunning views of the mountains and passes of Snowdonia.

Seeing the stone and slate house again, Richard did sigh and Anna reached for his hand.

"Home," she said, stopping outside the garden gate. "Go on in while I drive around into the yard."

He got out and retrieved his case but halted. "No, I'll wait for you."

He put the case down on the front step and she saw him walk over to the wall surrounding the small garden. He leant over it, gazing down into the valley.

"The sheep will be lambing soon." She joined him.

"Yes."

"Shall we go in? I made stew this morning. All I have to do is heat it through. You must be starving."

"Mother made me some sandwiches for the train," he replied, not taking his eyes off the view. "But yes, I am."

"Come inside," she said softly, taking his hand and leading him into the house.

"Welcome home."

It was only when he was rid of his overcoat that she saw just how thin he was. Six foot tall, he had been well built, well muscled before the war. Now he was emaciated, his body wasted away.

He turned to her from a re-acquainting glance around the kitchen and caught her staring at him.

"You will feed me up, won't you?" he asked quietly.

"Of course I will," she whispered, fighting back tears. "Starting with this stew." She went to the solid fuel range, threw on some wood, pulled the saucepan over the heat and stirred the contents vigorously. Soon she couldn't see what she was doing and dropped the spoon into it. "Damn." She tried to wipe her eyes but it was no use. "Damn it..."

"Anna," he said softly and she felt his hands around her waist turning her around. "Darling."

"I'm sorry!" she spluttered. "I was determined not to cry!"

"Why?"

"Because I was so afraid that you weren't going to come home! That I'd get a telegram like Mam and Tad! Now you are home...I didn't want you to see me cry! I wanted to be happy, am happy! But I'm so relieved that I can't help it!"

"Oh Anna..!" His hands were in her hair, exploring her curls.

"You're so thin," she cupped his face in her hands. "Good food, rest, and fresh air. You'll soon be back to your old self."

For the first time he smiled but it was not a smile of agreement.

"Who is the doctor here?" he demanded. "You or me?"

She stared at him for a moment, not quite knowing how to respond to his sudden angry tone. She tried to pacify him.

"I'm going to be your doctor for the time being."

"They say that doctors make the worst patients," he muttered, moving away from her.

"I don't care," she replied stubbornly and began to fish the spoon out of the stew.

"How are your parents?" he asked as he set the table.

"Mam has finally accepted that Huw will never be coming home. Tad is still caring more about everyone else than himself."

"Your father should have retired years ago by rights."

"He would only have brooded."

"How many from the parish?" he asked as she put a plate of the stew down in front of him.

She sighed, sitting down and prodding a carrot.

"Twenty four ended up in the services, most volunteered. Nine from the village and fifteen from the parish. Fifteen out of the twenty-four are dead. Daffyd Llywelyn's two boys, one of Jennie Evans'...Huw...boys I grew up with, went to school with...gone..."

"Injuries to the rest?"

"Bob Madoc is blind. Dai Lewis lost an arm. The rest...mostly stammers, twitches, nightmares, nervous things. On quiet nights I can hear them from here..." She blew her nose. "Eat your stew before it gets cold."

She couldn't help but watch him eat. He ate so fast that she was amazed that he didn't choke. He picked out all the pieces of beef and wolfed them down, barely halting to chew, before starting on the vegetables. She had to tell herself to look away and was barely half way through her own meal when he finished his.

"There is more if you want?"

"No, that was very tasty."

She nodded, wondering how he had managed to taste anything at all.

He watched her as she washed up then got rose from the table.

"I suppose I had better show my face next door."

"I told them not to expect us until the morning."

He nodded and sat down again.

"Good. I'm not looking forward to it. I'll prolong the agony for a bit longer."

"The agony?" She dried her hands and put the towel to dry on the rack above the range.

"That I came home and Huw didn't. The English son-in-law survived but the Welsh son didn't."

Her heart lurched painfully. "Don't be ridiculous, Richard!"

"I am not being ridiculous!" His voice rose. "Have you ever asked them how they feel?"

She sank down onto the chair nearest to her and faced him across the table.

"No. Not about that. Please don't feel guilty or you'll go mad."

His lips twitched. "Maybe I am."

"No, you're not." She began to feel frightened.

"How the hell do you know?" he roared. "I'm the bloody doctor, Anna! I know mad when I see it!"

"Please don't feel guilty," she repeated quietly.

He didn't reply but got up from the table instead.

"I'm going up to bed."

She shot a quick glance at the clock. "But the time..!"

"I'm tired and I have to unpack."

He left the room and she heard him go upstairs. Anna sat motionless at the table. He shouldn't feel guilty. He mustn't think that her parents wished that Huw had come home and not him. It wasn't true and he had to be told.

She took the lamp and went up to their bedroom. Opening the door and going in, she nearly fell over his feet. He lay stretched out on a makeshift bed of blankets completely naked. He smiled up at her. His first genuine smile.

"In France, nakedness was a luxury. My dick didn't get much of an airing!"

She froze. She had never heard him use such crude language before and chose to ignore it.

"What's wrong with the bed?"

"Not used to them anymore," he replied and scratched himself.

"But surely you had beds over there?"

"Not like ours."

"Are you sure you're comfortable?" She watched as he scratched himself again.

"It must be freezing down there on the boards. Why don't I heat some water, you could have a bath?"

"I had a bath first thing this morning," he replied tightly. "I'm not dirty and I don't have lice. I made bloody sure of that. I scratch. It's a habit. I can't help it. You seriously don't think that I would come home to you with a million and one 'friends' all over my body, do you?"

Anna shuddered. "I just don't like seeing you down there on the boards..."

"It's fine but you could join me..?"

"What? Come to bed? But it's only..!"

"Christ Anna! I'm asking you if you want a welcome home fuck!"

She shook. "Don't be so disgusting, Richard!"

"Well, you didn't seem to understand when I'm not! Do you?"

Tears stung her eyes. "No."

He stared at her. "Doesn't want to be kissed in public. Doesn't want her husband to fuck her...did you really want me to come home, Anna?"

"What?" she asked faintly. That was too much. She sank to her knees slapping and thumping him until her tears obscured her vision and she had to stop. "Of course I did! I love you!"

"That's all I wanted to hear," he said quietly. "Not once have you told me since I got off the train that you love me."

"I do," she whispered. "I thought it was obvious."

"It's nice to be told sometimes." He wiped her tears away with his fingers. "And I need to be told now. I know I'm not the man you married, Anna."

"Don't say that. It's hard, Richard. We've been married nearly five years but we have only lived together a few months..."

"They were good, though!" He grinned at her. "The spring and summer of 1914 with my beautiful wife. Christ, you don't know much I used to think about those few months. They lasted me over four years. Our honeymoon in Llandudno, having a fuck whenever we could. Coming back here, having a fuck whenever we could. You teaching me Welsh. Your father retiring and you coming with me on my rounds. I don't think that house down near Ned Hughes' farm had seen so much action in years! If ever!"

She smiled and nodded remembering.

"I used to tell the lads about here," he went on. "I'm sure they used to think I was a bit..!" He tapped the side of his head.

"Did you tell them about me?"

"Bits and pieces. Most of you I kept to myself! I couldn't have them getting randy and trying to get away to the town to the prostitutes! Especially if we were in 'pre-op' and I was preparing to amputate their arms and legs or whatever!"

"Did you..?"

"Go to a prostitute? No. Not even when I was called back early and so missed you for a second time. No, I would just go off by myself, lie back and think of you and Wales. Quite satisfying, but what I would have given for it to have been you and here..." He smiled wistfully. "Then I got caught by an orderly who had had the same idea. Every time I would go out after that I'd get 'off for a wank, then?' or 'off to wank his dick, is Dick!'. I was Dick for evermore after that!"

She stroked his face. "I cried for days when I arrived in London and your

mother told me that I had missed you again."

"Bloody post."

"Well, you'll never have to...do that again," she told him softly and began to unbutton her blouse.

"And what about the time?" he teased.

"Damn the time!" She smiled in return.

He quickly undressed her, threw her clothes up onto the bed and lowered her down onto the blankets. She gazed up at him, at his skeletal, heavily stubbled face, his black hair limp and lifeless and hanging down over his forehead. His eyes seemed to have changed colour yet again, this time to black, thanks to the lamplight, but she didn't care. She loved him.

"Mrs Anna Brett," he murmured, stroking her. "I do believe you have filled out!"

"I'm not the twenty-one year-old girl you married anymore, Dr Richard Brett! If I fill out anymore it will be due to fat!"

"You'll never get fat! If anyone is going to get fat, it will be dear old middle-aged me!"

"Middle-aged! Richard, for goodness sake, you're only thirty five!"

"Help me prove that I'm not old, then!"

She arched her back and he took her waist, murmuring appreciatively as he kissed her. This was perfect, rediscovering the places they liked the other to kiss and touch most. He laughed softly and rolled over as she kissed his mouth and then his chest.

"Oh God!" he moaned then laughed louder in delight. "We haven't forgotten, have we?"

"Definitely not!"

"And I remember what happens now!"

Except that it didn't.

"Richard?" she murmured. "Richard, come on! Don't tease now of all times! Come on!" She opened her eyes and saw him kneeling astride her, staring silently down at himself in consternation. "Richard?" She raised herself onto her elbows.

"I can't...it won't...!" He both looked and sounded horrified. "Do something, Anna!"

"But I have been...all right." But no matter how hard she tried nothing worked. She stared helplessly at him and saw that he was on the verge of panic. "Richard! Richard, do it...what you were saying earlier..."

"No! Not in front of you! Christ, Anna..!"

"But..?" she began then sighed. "All right. All right," she whispered as he dissolved into tears. "Come on, lie down with me."

They lay down together on the blankets and she covered them with the thickest ones she could find. She stroked his hair as he cried, not knowing what to say or do.

"I want you," he said in a small voice. "I've been looking forward to it for over a year. I'm so sorry, Anna."

"Shh," she kissed his forehead. "It's not your fault."

"But it must be!"

"We'll try again soon. When you're stronger and more used to being home."

He nodded and sighed.

"I love you, Richard. You don't know how happy I am to have you home."

"You mean that?" he croaked.

"I wouldn't have said it otherwise."

He nodded. "I love you, too, Anna."

"Now sleep."

"You're staying here?"

"Yes." She found a smile from somewhere. "I'm staying here with you."

Chapter Two

The next morning, washed, shaved, and in fresh clothes, which were far too big for him now, Richard was beginning to resemble his old self. In his eyes, however, Anna saw both pain and fear.

"Now I know why I married you!" She kissed him when he came into the kitchen.

"I'm sorry," he said for the umpteenth time.

"We'll try again soon. Don't worry."

"I'll try not to."

"We'll pop next door after breakfast, see Mam and Tad before he goes on his rounds. And what you said yesterday about Huw, they don't think that at all. They love you, Richard, and so do I."

"Yes. Then, can we go for a walk? I want to breath some fresh air."

"We'll try and find the first lambs, yes?"

"The first lambs were always at Ned Hughes'."

"Well, we'll see." She turned back to the range, acutely aware that she was talking to him as if he were a five year old and not a grown man.

She waited on tenterhooks for one of her parents to open the door to them. It was all very well her saying that they thought anything of Richard having come home and not Huw, but what would they actually do when they saw him?

Her mother answered the door and Anna smiled weakly at her. Her mother smiled then turned to her son-in-law, reached up to touch his face, as if making sure that he was real, and then flung her arms around him.

"Oh Richard, my dear boy!" She hugged him tightly. "You are so welcome home!"

"Thank you, Mrs Jones." He kissed her cheek.

"Go through to the kitchen, Dai is in there."

"Richard, boy!" Anna's father got up from the table. He clasped Richard's shoulders, held him at arm's length for a moment, and then held him to him.

"Welcome home, boy." He ended on a whisper and the tears rolled down his cheeks. He turned away abruptly, fumbling in a trouser pocket for a handkerchief. "I'm all right," he croaked.

"No, you're not." Richard immediately took charge. "Sit down." He took the older man's arm and sat him down. "A glass of water, Anna, please."

She passed it to him and stood at her father's side, stroking his hair while Richard knelt down and held the glass to his lips. The water was gulped down and Jones sat back in the chair with a groan.

"I'm sorry."

"No." Richard squeezed his arm. "I am. I know how much you loved Huw. It was such a bloody waste!"

Anna quickly looked across at her mother, not knowing how she would react to Richard swearing in front of her. Thankfully, Mrs Jones did not seem to have noticed.

"I know, boy, but he died for his country. We're so proud of him."

Richard didn't reply.

"The village hasn't changed very much?" Mrs Jones asked him brightly.

"No." He got up and turned to her. "Not outwardly, anyway." He looked down at Jones. "You sit there for a few minutes, Dai."

Jones nodded. "You wrote such a good letter after Huw...Thanks, boy, I know you must have been rushed off your feet."

Richard smiled weakly. "I made time, Dai."

"Was it really terrible, Richard?" Mrs Jones asked tentatively.

Richard pressed his lips together then released them in a long sigh.

"Yes," he replied simply. "It was."

"You're very thin, boy." Anna saw her father look Richard up and down critically. "You feed him up, Anna," he commanded.

"I will, Tad." She reached out and squeezed Richard's hand.

"There are things I did there, Dai," he swallowed noisily. "To helpless men who thought I was helping them. Anywhere else and I would have been struck off, just like that!" He clicked his fingers. "Patching men up so they could be sent back to fight and be injured again, or most likely killed! The things I was forced to do there - butchery!"

Jones shook his head. "Dai Lewis told me that the surgeons, orderlies and nurses all worked like Trojans."

"And look where the hell they left him!" Richard flashed. "Without an arm! The reason I'm like this!" He pulled at the jumper and overcoat hanging on his frame. "Is because the food I ate never stayed down long enough!"

"Richard..." Anna spoke as calmly as she could to stop him, seeing her mother's face pale.

He sighed angrily, glaring at the floor, his hands on his hips.

"I'm sorry," he said finally. "Rest there for a few minutes, won't you, Dai? You're probably doing far too much. We'll have to talk about you retiring for good." He picked his hat up from the kitchen table, strode to the back door and went out into the yard.

Jones blew out his cheeks.

"That boy is in as fit a state to start over again as I am to climb Snowdon! Anna-lass, be patient with him. God only knows what he's seen and done." She nodded. "And last night? Were there any nightmares like the other boys have?"

"He was talking in his sleep but I couldn't understand. It must have been in French."

"I know." He kissed her hand. "Go after him."

"You don't want me to drive you..?"

"No, I can manage with May and the trap. Go after him, lass."

"I will. Look after yourself, Tad. Don't do too much."

"I'll make sure he doesn't," her mother spoke firmly. "You go to Richard."

She found him leaning over the garden wall gazing intently down into the valley. She put an arm around his waist and rested her forehead on his shoulder.

"Shall we go and find some lambs?"

"I'm sorry." He straightened up. "I think I upset your mother. I don't have the patience I once had."

"She understands."

He shook his head. "The way your father looked at me, wishing I was Huw..."

"No!"

"Then why did he cry?" he demanded.

"Because, of course, he would have loved for the two of you to have come home but he was so relieved that one of you did! Like me. I love you, Richard. We all do. Never think that we don't."

He gave her a little smile then took off his hat and kissed her.

"You'll wonder why you put up with me soon."

"No, I won't," she replied firmly.

They walked down the hill away from the village. It was a crisp frosty morning but the sun was slowly turning the whiteness green again. Beside her, Richard would stop every hundred yards or so and breathe in and out deeply.

"Fresh air," he said slowly. "The things I breathed in over there. I won't tell you what, it will only turn your stomach."

"Richard." She stood in front of him and took his hands. "If you want to talk, then, do. Please. Don't keep it all to yourself."

"But I've just told you, it will turn your stomach."

"I think I've got quite a strong stomach."

He shrugged. "I thought I had, too."

They walked on and soon reached the old house. Richard slowed and stared at it wistfully.

"We haven't found any lambs yet." She tried to lead him past but he stopped.

"Do you remember the first time we came here? We went upstairs, not realising that the floors were rotten, and they collapsed. We ended up almost buried in the hay below, then we fucked each other silly."

"Richard, do you have to use that language?" she asked softly. "I know we did but..."

"But what if we can't ever again?"

"Don't say that, we don't know."

"But you want children eventually! So do I! Christ, Anna..!"

In an effort to calm his agitation she put her arms around him and rocked him from side to side as if he were a child.

"You shouldn't get so worked up. Anxiety might cause it. Strain. I don't know. I know it's difficult but try not to think about it."

"But I'm so scared. I might lose you. You're young, you won't want a man who can't perform."

"I will!" Tears began to roll down her cheeks. "I love you! I married you for better or worse! You're stuck with me!" She tried to smile but failed miserably.

She sighed as he kissed her tears away and then kissed her lips.

"Let me just say this," he whispered. "If it turns out that I can't ever and you want a divorce, I'll help you in every way that I can. I won't stand in your way, Anna, I promise."

She stared at him for a moment as his words slowly sank in before she grabbed the lapels of his overcoat and shook him with all her strength.

"No! No! No! I would never do that! I would rather be childless than be without you! Don't you understand? I would never do that to you! You've been away over four years, I've seen you only a handful of times but I've never ever stopped loving you!"

She shook him one last time then sank sobbing onto the road.

"Oh Anna..." He picked her up and carried her into the house and placed her down gently on the hay. He took off her hat, put it to one side, followed by his own, and lay down holding her tightly. "I'm sorry."

"I love you," she croaked. "Never mention that again. Ever."

"I promise. Are you all right?"

"Yes. This hay is much more comfortable than the floor boards." She gave him a little smile.

"Anna, darling, I'm so sorry."

"Every time I'd see Evan the telegram boy, I'd freeze thinking that you had been killed. Then that day he passed all the other houses in the village and there was only Mam and Tad's and ours left. He was coming with a telegram to one of us! It was horrible! When he went into Mam and Tad's, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry!" She closed her eyes and she felt him leaning over her, his lips on her face. "And that's not all."

"What do you mean?" He drew back.

"Huw's kit," she whispered. "It was sent home. I have it. I couldn't let Mam and Tad see it because it's..." She shuddered.

"Where is it?" he asked gently.

"On top of the wardrobe in the spare bedroom. I just had to see it, to see how bad it was, and it is bad. It was bad enough them knowing that he was dead then seeing all his clothes and things and the state they're in. And then, after a while, I began to think that I should give it to them but I'd had it for months and the longer it went on..."

"Oh Anna..." He sighed. "Oh God..."

"I should have just given it to them, shouldn't I?" she asked just as the door opened and Ned Hughes himself walked in. Anna sat bolt upright, her head just missing Richard's.

"Oh! Oh Lord!" Ned jumped violently on realising that he wasn't alone. "Mrs Brett," he touched his cap. "And Dr Brett! Welcome home, Doctor! How are you?"

"I'm fine, Ned, thank you." Richard began to pick bits of hay off his coat and then Anna's. "We were, my wife and I were just..."

"You don't have to explain, Doctor!" Ned winked knowingly. "I came back from South Africa to my Janie, God rest her!"

"Oh. Good." Richard shuffled uncomfortably. "Well, how are you keeping?"

"Oh, can't complain! Bringing a bite of hay to the sheep. First lamb arrived yesterday. Last night was very cold so I must check on him."

"Could we come and see him?" Anna asked, the thought of going home to unwrap Huw's kit again filled her with dread. "We were on the look-out for the first one."

"Of course you can! He's a grand little fellow!"

Ned took a pitchfork-full of hay and Anna and Richard followed him down the road to the small paddock where the ewes and new-born lambs were held. She clasped his hand tightly. How could he have suggested divorce? It had only happened once.

It was a big lamb but he looked cold. He stood next to his mother with his back hunched.

Ned opened the gate and went into the field with the hay.

"Come on, then!" he shouted to the sheep. "Breakfast!"

One sheep caught sight of the hay and baaed. Then, suddenly, there was a mad stampede towards Ned and the lamb lay motionless on the grass.

"I don't believe it! She's trodden on it!" Ned dropped the pitchfork and hurried across the field. "Why are sheep so bloody stupid!"

"Anna, quick!" Richard opened the gate and they ran across to the farmer.

"No, the mud..!" Ned protested.

"Never mind the mud! How is he?" Richard crouched down.

Anna could only watch helplessly as Richard's hands moved over the lamb's body. It coughed weakly and a drop of blood fell from its nose followed by another and another.

"Dead." Richard sighed. "Sorry, Ned."

"These things happen. Not off to a great start this year, am I?" He picked up the lamb by its hind legs. "I'd better bury the poor little bugger before the crows get at him. Thanks for your help, Doctor, Mrs Brett."

"I hope you have better luck next time," she replied and watched him walk away with the lamb. Turning back, she saw Richard starting down at the blood on the grass. "Shall we go home?" she asked hesitantly.

He nodded. "But I must apologise to your parents first. And then we must do something about Huw's kit."

By the time they returned to Bryn-y-Gwynt, Anna's father had started his rounds but her mother brought them in for coffee.

"I came to apologise, really." Richard helped Anna off with her coat. "I'm sorry if I upset you."

"No!" Mrs Jones cried dismissively, kissing his cheek and Anna knew that her mother lied. "Come through, I have the kettle on to boil."

"Well, I am sorry."

"Did you enjoy your walk?"

"Yes." Richard sat down at the table, picked up the newspaper then put it down again. "Thank you."

Anna met her mother's eyes for a moment before going to the dresser for mugs.

"See any lambs?"

"Yes, and the poor little thing was then trampled to death by its stupid mother."

"Oh no!"

"The mother probably reduced its intestines to a bloody mass, given that she trod right on its stomach." Richard spoke matter-of-factly and Anna saw her usually hardy mother pale again. "Do you mind if I wash my hands?"

"No, not at all. Now, Richard, it's a little milk and one sugar, isn't it?"

"No, no sugar, thanks. I learned to do without."

"And I know that Anna just takes milk!" Mrs Jones smiled and put the kettle back on the range. "Welcome home again, Richard."

"Thank you." He reached out and squeezed her hand. "Tell me honestly, now, how are you?"

"Oh, not bad! All the more better for having you home again. You don't know how much we missed you."

He smiled. "And Dai? You can tell me all, he's not here to argue!"

"Well, he's not getting any younger..." Anna knew that her mother was being deliberately vague. "And what without Huw now..."

"He should retire now," Richard told her firmly. "I'm back now, I can take over again."

"Richard, dear," Mrs Jones laid a hand on his arm and smiled kindly. "No. You've been away from home for years. Settle back in first. Spend some time with Anna. Put some weight back on before you start working again."

"But Dai..?" he protested.

"I'll take care of Dai," she replied softly yet firmly. "We'll all keep an eye on him. You have a rest first."

"Well..." He was doubtful. "If you're sure..?"

"You are the doctor, my dear! Surely you think that you need a rest?"

"Maybe." He looked over at Anna and she smiled and nodded. "Well, all right, then."

The first thing he did when they got home was sigh. He stood at the bottom of the stairs and watched as she hung up her coat and hat.

"Come up," he said and followed her up the stairs and into the spare bedroom.

"Up there." She motioned to the wardrobe. "On the top."

He reached up and took the package down and put it on the floor. Her heart thumped as he opened it revealing Huw's cap, crumpled out of shape and covered in the mud of the Somme, the Prince of Wales feathers on badge of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers barely visible. Richard swallowed and put it to one side before picking up the tunic. It was also caked with mud and riddled with holes, as were his khaki breeches and braces. Everything stank of something indescribable. Richard sat back on his heels, covered his face with his hands and exhaled a low groan.

"Richard?" She crouched beside him and he held her as they both wept. "Why do they send the things back like this?" she whispered and he shrugged and shook his head. "He was so proud of his uniform. You should see the picture in Mam and Tad's parlour." She couldn't help but smile. "Lieutenant Huw Jones." She fingered the tunic. "I couldn't give them this, Richard, I just couldn't."

"I know, but we can't keep them either. They stink." He picked up the cap. "We might be able to do something with this, though. Brush the mud off, pull it back into shape, clean the badge..?"

She nodded. "Remember how disappointed Tad was when Huw announced that he wanted to study law and not medicine?"

"Yes, and angry, too, but Huw was a determined so-and-so and when he made his mind up that was it." Richard passed the cap to her, folded the clothes neatly and replaced them in the packaging before rising. "Anna, these will have to be burned. We can't bury them. They smell so much that we can't risk a dog or some other animal digging them up."

"I know. Let's do it now and then try and do something with the cap." Suddenly, she grabbed his arm. "But what will we tell them?"

"I had it," he said simply. "I wanted to give it to them myself properly and you with me."

"Thank you."

"There is no need," he replied gently.

The clothes disposed of, they set to work on the cap. The mud was brushed off and the cap reshaped while Anna found some polish for the badge.

"Good," Richard said eventually, holding it up. "They can't expect it to be perfect. Shall we go now?" he asked and she nodded.

"This is a nice surprise!" Jones exclaimed on opening the door to them. "Come in!"

"Dai, this isn't really a social visit," Richard began. "I have something for you."

"I see. Come into the parlour, then."

Anna's eyes immediately fell on the picture of Huw on the mantelpiece and bit her lips.

"What's the matter?" Her mother immediately rose from her chair. "Is there something wrong?"

"I have something for you," Richard repeated and held up the cap. "It's Huw's." Anna's mother's hands flew to her face and all the blood seemed to drain from her father's. "I asked for it. Anna and I wanted to give it to you together."

"It is Huw's?" Jones whispered, taking the cap.

"It is Huw's." Richard confirmed it.

"Look," Jones turned to his wife.

"Would you like a cup of tea, Mam?" Anna asked gently.

"I would, Anna, thank you."

Waiting for the kettle to come to the boil she heard the kitchen door.

"I thought I would leave them alone for a few minutes," Richard told her. "How are you?"

"All right." She made the tea then froze, hearing her mother crying. "Mam..."

"Leave them for a few minutes. Let them comfort each other."

She nodded and he put his arms around her.

Mrs Jones was wiping her eyes when they went in again. Her husband squeezed her arm then smiled thanks at them for giving them some privacy.

Later that evening they lay together on the couch in the parlour. That Huw's kit was now dealt with was a huge weight off her mind and she smiled as Richard's hands caressed her breasts and his lips kissed her neck. She had missed him and this so much. What if he...no, she told herself, you are not to start thinking like that. She turned over and stroked his face and hair.

"Two weeks tomorrow we'll be married five years."

He smiled. "I'll never forget the first time I saw you. You came to take my hat and coat. I can still see you in that blue dress with your hair in a thick plait down your back. You stared at me for a few moments, which didn't help! Then you smiled, and to a really nervous doctor, eager to make a good impression, wondering if he would be able to live here after London, that was it!"

"You were very slow at learning Welsh! I wonder why that was!"

"I can't imagine!" He clasped her face in his hands and kissed her hungrily only to break off when a loud wailing noise broke the silence. "What the hell is that?"

She sighed. "Dai Lewis having a nightmare. He'll stop in a minute. He either wakes himself up or his mother does it."

Richard winced as the wails continued.

"How often does it happen?"

"Too often. I don't mean that in a horrible way."

"I know." He clasped her to him. "Christ, the poor lad."

The wailing stopped as suddenly as it had begun and they both relaxed.

"Last night," she began hesitantly. "You were talking in your sleep. In French."

"Was I?" He frowned.

"Should I wake you up if you do it again?"

"If I'm disturbing you, yes. Shall we go to bed?"

"Bed?"

He nodded and smiled wryly. "The floor was a bit hard. Better to be too comfortable than too uncomfortable."

"I'm glad." She kissed his lips. "My muscles were aching all day!"

He sighed contentedly as they lay in bed. "Bliss! In bed at home with my beautiful wife!" He ran a hand up and down her leg. "We must do something special for our anniversary. I know!" He raised himself up on an elbow and grinned. "Another honeymoon to Llandudno." The grin faded. "But a honeymoon with no sex."

"Don't." She reached up to touch his face. "Maybe we shouldn't. I mean, can we afford to go?"

"I'm sure we could scrape enough together for a week. You never know, it might stir my John Thomas into action!" He lifted the blankets, smiled down comically and then back at her.

She couldn't help but smile back. "You never know!"

"I want you so much. I want so much to make love to you, Anna."

"I want you," she whispered. "But if he's a bit slow, leave it for a bit. I know it will be worth the wait. I remember the spring and summer of 1914, too, Richard Brett." She leaned over and kissed him and they settled.

He muttered aloud during the night. It was in English this time, something about a leg. She quickly moved to wake him but he turned over and stopped. She turned the lamp up a little and gazed at him, sleeping peacefully now. She must get him to talk about France. God only knew what had been going through his mind when he had been handling Huw's kit, seeing the mud, the bullet holes, inhaling that awful stench....She needed the second honeymoon to relax and get used to him being home again but he needed it desperately.

Chapter Three

They were at their breakfast when the back door opened and Anna's father looked in at them.

"How are the two of you this morning?"

"Fine, Dai, thanks." Richard put his slice of bread and marmalade down. "What about you?"

Jones smiled sadly. "The cap is on the top shelf in the china cabinet. Thanks, the two of you, for bringing it 'round. I'm not ashamed to admit that I had a good cry. Anyway, I'm off over to the Lewis', Dai had a bad night, I suppose you heard?"

"Yes, we did. Poor lad."

"If only I could get him to talk. He just won't. Anyway," he sighed. "I'll keep trying."

"Do. Oh, Anna and I are going away for a week for our anniversary. Llandudno again."

"Excellent!" He beamed at them. "It will do you the world of good!" The door closed.

"Richard?" she began tentatively. "You were talking in your sleep again last night. It was in English about a leg." She covered his hand with hers. "Please talk to me about France. Your letters told me little or nothing. They were all questions about what was happening here. Please?"

"Oh Anna..." He pulled a face. "I don't know...I mean, you're my wife. If you knew some of the things I've done..."

"I would have thought that a good reason to tell me." She watched him finger his knife. "You don't have to tell me all yet. Just a little bit at a time. It's eating away at you."

"All right. But let me," he spoke slowly and paused. "Let me try and straighten it out in my mind first. Yes?"

"Yes." She got up and went around the table and he moved his chair back to enable her to sit on his lap. "I love you," she whispered and kissed the top of his head.

"I..." he began then stopped. Someone was hammering at the front door. They exchanged a frown before going to answer it. Mrs Lewis from across the street was on the doorstep wringing her hands.

"Oh Doctor! Mrs Brett!" she cried. "It's my Dai!"

"What is it, Mrs Lewis?" Richard asked calmly.

"He's gone mad!" Her wild eyes turned to Anna, who immediately felt a pang of fear. "He's got your father, Mrs Brett! And he's got a knife!"

Anna's hand flew to her mouth and Richard's arm went around her immediately.

"Where, Mrs Lewis?" he asked.

"At home!"

"Which room?"

"His bedroom! I called Dr Jones because he's hardly slept for a week and when he does he gets nightmares!"

"All right." Richard's other arm went around her. She was on the verge of hysterics as they walked across the road to the house.

Anna saw her mother rushing out of her house clutching her head with Mrs Williams, who lived next door to the Lewis', hot on her heels. On seeing Richard she screamed at him.

"Get my Dai out of there, Richard!"

Anna knew that there would be absolutely no point in begging Richard not to go inside. He simply nodded to her mother and kissed Anna's cheek before turning back to Mrs Lewis.

"Where was he injured, Mrs Lewis?"

"Ypres. His arm got gangrene and had to be cut off!"

"All right," he replied softly. He turned back to Anna and squeezed her arm before going into the house.

By this stage most of the village had realised that something was seriously the matter and had begun to congregate behind Anna, her mother, and Mrs Lewis.

"Oh God!" Anna's mother's voice shook and Anna put an arm around her. She felt Mrs Lewis begin to shake and put her other arm around her. "Oh God!"

"Try not to worry, Mam."

"Try..!" Her mother gaped at her. "Your husband and your Tad are in that house with a madman!"

At that, Mrs Lewis burst into tears and Anna rolled her eyes.

"Mam, stop it now!"

She looked at the upstairs windows and bit her lips. It was very quiet. All kinds of horrible thoughts began to pass through her mind. Richard had survived the war, had

come home, but only two days later...no. She closed her eyes. Do not think like that, Anna.

"Oh!" She felt each woman tense.

Her eyes flew open and she saw Dai Lewis, eyes red from tears or lack of sleep, but probably both, followed by her father, looking pale and shaken, and lastly Richard, both pale and preoccupied, emerge from the house. Both women ran forward to her husband or son. Anna moved slowly forward and put her arms around Richard, holding him tightly to her.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine." He lightly kissed her cheek then looked over at Dai Lewis. "I want to bring him back to the house, Anna. I need to talk to him."

"What about his mother?"

He frowned. "No. Just Dai."

He went over and spoke to Mrs Williams. Anna heard him ask her to take Mrs Lewis home and make her a cup of tea and only let her come for Dai when he or Anna would call for her.

"Tad?" She went across to her parents and kissed his cheek. "How are you?"

"Thanking God that you have such a brave husband. Dai had gone berserk but Richard was so calm and actually got him to hand the knife over. I'm going home for a stiff drink. I'll be fine, Anna-lass."

She nodded and turned around to see Mrs Lewis being led away by Mrs Madoc, the crowd dispersing and Richard and Dai going into the house. She walked over, wondering if Richard wanted to talk to Dai alone. In the hall, however, Dai called to her.

"Anna? Oh God Anna, I'm so sorry!"

She looked to Richard, seating himself at the kitchen table.

"Would you like me to leave the two of you alone?"

"What do you think, Dai?" Richard asked him.

"Oh I don't mind. Anna and I were in the same class all through school. We know each other well enough. I don't mind talking in front of her. You mightn't like it, though."

"I might not," she agreed. "But I am interested, Dai."

She looked back at Richard who nodded and pointed to a chair.

She sat down between them and tried not to stare at Dai's empty sleeve. The arm had been amputated well above the elbow.

"Do you want a cup of tea or coffee before you start?"

"No, thank you."

"All right." Richard leaned forward and folded his arms on the table, smiling kindly. "You're tired, afraid to sleep at night. Why do you think that is, Dai?"

"I have the worst nightmares!" He clenched his fist.

"Tell me about them, Dai."

He swallowed nervously and rolled his eyes.

"It's when I had my arm amputated. I'm in the hospital, I've been given something for the pain but it's not enough. The surgeon is cutting my arm off and I can feel everything." He made a sawing motion with his hand on the empty sleeve. "Everything."

"And when you were having your arm amputated in reality?" Richard spoke very slowly. "What happened?"

"It's exactly like the nightmare, except that I passed out with the pain." He shuddered. "I wasn't given enough morphine but I did pass out. In my nightmare I don't. Why!" he cried. "I can really feel it!"

"The mind is very complex, Dai." Anna saw how very pale Richard had become. "It was probably the worst pain, both mentally and physically that you will ever experience."

"But will it get better?"

"In time, yes."

"In time! But I want to sleep, Doctor! I'm so tired!"

"I know, but you must not be afraid to sleep. It will get better. The nightmares will fade in time."

"I suppose so."

"Good. How are you coping without the arm?"

"Badly. I feel so useless. I can't dress myself, tie my shoelaces, I can't eat, write, or do anything!"

"Have you tried?"

He shook his head. "Mam wants to do everything for me."

"Would you like me to have a word with her?"

His face lit up. "Oh please! She treats me like such a baby!"

"All right. But you must have patience, Dai. In a way you are a baby again."

You are having to learn things all over again from scratch. Have patience with yourself, over your arm, and the nightmares. Another thing. Did anyone talk to you about an artificial arm?"

Dai pulled a face. "Yes, but I refused. I mean, I still won't be able to do anything with it. It will just be...there."

"Would you think about it again? It is possible that if your mother sees you with an arm, even if it is false, and she still has to do some things for you, that she might not 'mother' you so much in future."

"I suppose so."

"Good. I'll go and fetch her, then, and have a word with her."

Anna watched as Richard rose slowly from the table and went out. Something Dai had said was bothering him.

"I am sorry, Anna."

She turned to Dai and smiled. "Tad's fine, don't worry."

"It's just that Dr Jones doesn't understand, not like Dr Brett does."

"I know. How do you feel now?"

"Oh so much better for having talked about it!"

"I'm glad. Dai, if you ever feel that you want to get out of the house, if your mother is fussing too much, you can come over here and tell Richard and me how you are getting on."

"Thanks, Anna, I will. How are you?"

"So relieved that Richard is home. We'll be married five years next month. I'm finding it hard to get him to talk about France, though."

"He'll have to have done some really awful things there, Anna."

"Yes, but that's all the more reason why he should talk about it!" She sighed and smiled. "We're all having to be patient! Here's your mother and Richard back."

"Why didn't you tell me that I was fussing!" Mrs Lewis cried.

"I did, Mam!"

"I'm sorry, Dai, I can't help it, but I'll try. I'm so sorry, Mrs Brett, taking your day up like this."

"I think Richard has got everything sorted out now."

"Yes. Thank you, Doctor, Mrs Brett. No need to see us out."

The door closed and Richard sank down onto a chair. Anna quickly knelt beside him.

"Let me get you a drink."

"No." He squeezed her hands. "I'm fine."

"I don't think you are. Tell me what is wrong."

"Oh Christ!" He exploded. "Not enough morphine administered to the patient! The patient passing out under the knife! How many men have I given nightmares to?"

He began to shake and she grabbed his shoulders.

"Don't think that!"

"But..?"

"No! If you didn't give enough morphine to a patient, it wasn't your fault! How many patients did you have to operate on in a day?"

"Twelve or so in about twelve hours."

She tried to hide her shock. Twelve? Good grief!

"Well, I am positive that you would have done your absolute best in the circumstances."

He did not reply immediately but held her to him and rested his cheek on the top of her head.

"It was so bloody awful, Anna." His voice had sunk to a croak. "I've never felt so inadequate, well, the other night excepted." She did not comment, it was best to let him continue now that he had started to talk at last. "They just kept on coming. Whatever we did it was just never enough. Having to decide who and who not to operate on. Lads of eighteen, nineteen, calling for you and you having to ignore them because there was nothing more that you could do. The guns, bayonets, mines, gas, they all did their jobs so well that we could barely do ours. Trying to keep them clean, that mud got everywhere. Then, there were lice then fleas if someone had smuggled in a dog. You couldn't get rid of it, that dog, for some, it was the only friend they had.

"I just wanted to run, run away from it all, the mud, the men, the war. I just wanted to hide, to cover my eyes and ears and shut out everything but I couldn't. It's terrible, but a lot of the time I would be relieved when the patient would die."

He began to shake again and she raised her head. Tears were pouring down his cheeks. She took a handkerchief and attempted to dry his eyes but it was no use.

"It's over," she whispered. "You will never ever have to go back."

"It's not over if I can't stop thinking about it!"

"You've told me some of it now. Has it helped a bit?" He nodded. "And you helped Dai this morning."

"But he's only one! I dealt with hundreds! Thousands!"

"One is better than none. I think everyone sees you as a bit of a hero."

"Well, I'm not!" His eyes blazed angrily.

"Could you at least be mine?" she asked softly.

He sighed and smiled weakly at her. "How can I be?" he asked sadly. "I've come home a shadow of my former self. I'm vulgar, I swear, talk in my sleep, can't perform..."

"Shh." She covered his lips with her fingers. "You, Dr Richard Brett, are a hero to your wife, whether you like it or not."

She took her fingers away, lightly kissed his lips, then slowly and thoroughly kissed his mouth. When she drew back and opened her eyes he was smiling.

"I love you, Anna."

"And I love you, Richard."

That night there was silence in the village with no sound of nightmares coming from the Lewis house. Although Richard tossed and turned for a minute or two, to Anna's relief, he did not utter a word.

After breakfast, she and Richard went next door to see how her father was.

"I'd be fine," he told them, "if I wasn't fussed over so much!"

"It's only because Mam is worried about you, Tad."

"But I'm fine!"

"I know." Richard spoke with a smile. "But make the most of it, eh?"

Jones had to laugh and leaned over to kiss his wife's cheek.

"I suppose so! Richard?" He stood up and clasped his hand. "I haven't thanked you yet for yesterday."

"Not at all, Dai. I'm glad I was here and able to help."

"The boy's never done anything like that before."

"He probably hadn't been so afraid to sleep so much before."

"And now?"

"I got him to talk about his nightmare and it has helped considerably. Though, I'd say he is very ashamed of what he did now."

"Poor lad. What about you, boy?"

"Oh, I'm coming along slowly but surely."

"Have you done anything about Llandudno yet?" Mrs Jones asked. "You'll want to soon."

"We wrote yesterday." Anna replied. "To the hotel we went to for our honeymoon. Though, I doubt they will be booked out in February!"

"You never know. People might have had the same idea as you."

"Well, we'll see," Richard replied. "I can't wait!" He smiled at Anna.

Dai Lewis turned up on the doorstep the afternoon before they were due to leave. Anna received him hesitantly, not knowing if Richard wanted to see anyone. Their second attempt at love making the previous evening had again ended in failure. Richard was now pinning his hopes on the relaxation and sea air of the North Wales coast.

"I heard you were going tomorrow." He followed Anna into the kitchen. Richard was sitting at the table reading the newspaper. He hadn't spoken for over two hours. "I just wanted to wish you well and give you some good news."

"Oh?" Richard closed the newspaper.

"Yes, it's just that I haven't had a nightmare for over a week now. I've had two since we talked but that is all. I'm also going to see Dr Jones about getting a false arm."

"That is great news, Dai!" Richard jumped up and shook his hand. "Well done!"

"Yes, congratulations!" Anna kissed his cheek.

"I just wanted to thank you. You don't know what it meant to be able to talk to someone who was there and who understands."

"I'm glad we could help, Dai."

"Can I also say that you are starting to look a bit better, too?"

"Am I?" Richard looked down at himself. "Thanks very much!"

"Not at all! Have a nice holiday!"

"We will!" Anna saw him out and returned to the kitchen. "I'm so pleased for him, and proud of you for helping him."

"What? Oh yes." He frowned. "I'm sorry, I'm still thinking about last night. I want you so much, Anna."

"Llandudno," she whispered.

"I hope so," he replied simply.