

03. Examinations and Revelations

Tuesday, June 13, 1865

My train pulled into the Folkestone West station at exactly 10:00 AM. The trip had been uneventful, remarkable only in that the scenery seemed to me to be especially beautiful and the weather exceptionally lovely. As the train halted, I placed my new hat upon my head and exited my compartment.

On the platform I saw the broad, smiling face of Jack Bates, a man I already thought of as a friend. His beard and hair seemed even wilder than it had just one week before.

“Are you she, then?”

“Oh, Jack Bates! You make me laugh! I have missed you so. As I said one week ago, I am indeed ‘she.’”

“Good to see you again, missy.”

“Did you receive my trunks?”

“Yes. I fetched the one to your rooms in Hawkinge and the other up to the manor. It remains only to take you where you wish. Windsor Castle, perhaps?”

“No, Jack. The Queen hasn’t requested my presence. I think Mrs. Bourne’s rooms in Hawkinge would be a better destination.”

I mounted the wagon and we started. We turned into the Dover Road and then into the Canterbury Road, heading toward the village.

“So, please tell me, how is Sir Reginald faring?”

“He is as well as before. Possibly better, because of his anticipation of your coming.”

“He expects, perhaps, some improvement in his health?”

“I would guess so, Miz Patricia. And while your skills make you more than just a pretty face, I don’t doubt that your pretty face is part of the equation, too!”

“Why, Jack! You make me blush! Thank you kindly!”

At The White Horse, we turned into Oak Street, and pulled up in front of Mrs. Bourne’s house. She was on the front porch.

“Hello, Mrs. Goodman. I understood you would return to us today. I hope you are fine!”

“Why yes, I’m quite well, Mrs. Bourne. I hope you are, too. I don’t wish to appear impolite, but if you’ll excuse me, I must go to my rooms to change into my working clothes.”

I ascended the stairs to my rooms and found all in order. My trunk was there, and I opened it. I made little attempt at unpacking; my goal was simply to get out of my traveling outfit (and that damned crinolette!) and into the plainer uniform of a nurse.

On my way downstairs, I bumped into Mr. Uriah Grimstead, quite literally. He was in a rush.

“Oh, hello, Mr. Grimstead. Do have a care. We mustn’t knock each other over, you know.”

“Oh, Mrs. Goodfellow! I am so sorry, to be sure. I shall be more careful in the future.” He continued his dash upstairs.

Mrs. Goodfellow? Hmmm... Mr. Grimstead’s effect upon me, as I noted after our first meeting, was a bit chilling. I thought to myself I’ve seen better looking corpses at St. Thomas’ Hospital.

I said goodbye to Mrs. Bourne and promised her that we would chat later. I boarded my “carriage,” and traveled the short distance to Folkestone Manor. I mentioned to Jack how unsettling it was to meet Mr. Grimstead. What I did not tell him was that in some way Grimstead reminded me of the black-clad stranger I had seen in London.

“Aye, Missy. I understand. As we say in Kent, he ‘creeps you out.’ He’s an odd one, and Hawkinge isn’t known to be a destination for summer tourists. Our visitors are most often hops pickers coming third class in trains from London.”

At the manor, Meg Bates was at the front door to greet me. “Miz Patricia! Get away from that nasty man and come give me a hug!”

“Certainly, Meg! How are you?”

“Fine, fat, and frivolous. Now tell me, what are your marchin’ orders, as Jack is wont to say?”

“Ah, I have thought this through. Jack, please ask Sir Reginald to meet me in the library at half eleven for an interview about his health history. Then, after dinner, I intend to examine him in his room. That will require that he remove his suit and change into his dressing gown. Now, Meg, I ask that you show me my day room.”

Meg took me to a room on the north side of the manor. We entered and I looked it over.

Like all rooms north and south of the central hallway, this one had large windows, French doors really, looking out upon the grounds. I had a view of the outbuildings, the meadow, the forest, a lake, and a small stream.

I could see that Meg had cleaned the room thoroughly, and I suspected that it had gone unused for a long time. It had a large table, a writing desk, three chairs, and an armoire.

“You’re directly across from the dining room and about three rooms down from Sir Reginald.”

“This is perfect. In the afternoon, I will unpack my trunk of medical accessories. Oh, and it occurs to me that if you can locate various linens—sheets and towels—they will come in quite handy in the near future. Also, I should like a small cabinet to store medical instruments and various drugs.

“Ho, young lady! Sounds a bit like my kitchen, only for doctoring. This is no problem at all. Oh, and I just now thought of it: you’ll need a basin and pitcher for ablutions.”

“Ah Meg, you are a joy! Thank you! Tell me, may I join you for dinner?”

“Yes indeed. You are expected. Today we have Lancashire hotpot. And there’s my fresh-baked bread, of course.”

“That sounds wonderful. I’m wondering if it’s too rich for Sir Reginald.”

“I think not, Miz Pat. He barely eats anyway.”

“First thing, I’ll see whether I cannot fix that.”

Meg left me, and I unpacked a number of items, placing them on the work table. Particularly, I needed my medical journal, and two of the drugs I had obtained.

At precisely 11:30 AM, I entered the library. Sir Reginald was there.

“Hello, Mrs. Goodman. I am ready for you.”

“And I for you, Sir Reginald. How are you feeling?”

“Very much the same as always. However, I’m encouraged by your arrival.”

“Excellent! I must inquire, are you in pain?”

“Somewhat, but that isn’t unusual.”

“Very well. I propose to ask you numerous questions about your health history. Then, I have brought some new substances that may help with pain. To begin, when were you born?”

“I was born in 1830, in Downton, Wiltshire.”

“Are your parents healthy?”

“They *were* healthy, until 1846, when both perished in the cholera epidemic. I survived. My father was 66 years of age when he died. I then became the 5th Earl of Radnor, etc. etc. etc.”

“His occupation?”

“Member of Parliament. He was at one point lieutenant colonel of the Berkshire Regiment of Militia, but that is of little consequence.”

“Did you have any childhood diseases?”

“None that I recall. Except the cholera, of course.”

“Were you educated at home, away from other children?”

“Only at the beginning. I later attended Harrow and Christ Church, Oxford. There was plenty of opportunity for illness and athletic injury, but I seem to have survived.”

“Have you any other relatives?”

“Yes, I have a sister, Eustace Pleydell. She lives in Grosvenor Square in the Mayfair district of London. We do not speak, so I cannot give you an appraisal of her health.”

“May I ask why you two do not speak?”

“You may. She was embittered over my inheritance. I ascended to the title of Earl, as was correct for the first and only son to do, and also received four large estates. Three of them are exceedingly profitable, with Folkestone Manor the least so. My sister’s portion was a large cash payment and a generous lifetime annuity. But that wasn’t enough. Quite frankly, she has always wanted everything.”

“I see. That is most unfortunate. Well, to go in a different direction, when did you begin your military career?”

“In 1848, I was commissioned an ensign in the 3rd Regiment of Foot—The Buffs. I was sent directly to Ireland. There I found the potato famine, the Young Irelander Rebellion, and numerous provocations. In any event, the regiment did not participate in the Second Anglo-Sikh War in 1848 and 1849. From Ireland, we were sent directly to the Crimea, and from there, I believe you know the rest of the story. In our last interview, I described my wounds to you as well as I know them.”

“Yes. Thank you. Er, excuse me, Sir Reginald, but in the Crimean, did you encounter any diseases transmitted through, er, sexual intercourse?” I began to blush.

“No. Not in Istanbul. Nor in England or Ireland.”

“England? Ireland?”

“Dear Mrs. Goodman, surely you know that sexual intercourse is available everywhere.”

I blushed further, although I was impressed by Sir Reginald’s frank response.

“Excuse me, Sir Reginald. I should have realized that. But did you not worry?”

“Yes, of course. All soldiers should worry about getting the pox. It’s fortunate that officers have access to better whores than enlisted men, and Jack Bates kept me out of trouble, as well.”

My blush was now complete. I attempted to recover. “Then let us, er, let us turn to your present regimen. You seem fairly fit. How is that accomplished?”

“I manage pain from my wounds by using laudanum and whiskey. Jack forces me to work out on a kind of stationary bicycle daily. Aside from that, I am obliged to lift myself via a grip and a chain mechanism to rise from the bed and another to take my daily bath.”

“This is all excellent. I cannot cure an unfit patient. I will propose to you additional exercises to further prevent atrophy of your leg muscles, and to further increase upper body strength. If you eat well, you will be quite robust, needing only to address the problem of walking.

“I should also point out that laudanum and whiskey will kill you as surely as poor diet. They are deadly substances when used in excess. However, I have some suggestions that you may appreciate.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Goodman. ‘Needing *only* to address the problem of walking.’ Har! With your help, I will be the fittest cripple in the south of England.”

“And the one with the worst attitude. Please keep your mind open. Now, if you please, tell me what constitutes your daily routine?”

“I rise early. With Jack’s assistance, I bathe. I then spend my morning in this room, the library.”

“What do you do there, or here, rather?”

“I read and I drink. I sometimes gaze out the windows.”

“Do you have any urge to tour your grounds?”

“None whatsoever. Not if I’m to be pushed around in a bloody wheelchair. I am content with the news of the estate that Jack and Meg bring me.”

“Very well. At the least, I hope you open the windows for some fresh air. What do you do at mid-day?”

“At o’clock, Meg serves me dinner in the dining room. If that grand room with portraits of hoary ancestors is too depressing, I dine in this room. Meg’s cooking is excellent, but, as you may have heard, I eat very little.”

“That, of course, is not good for your health. If there is any good, it is that eating little keeps your weight down. What of the rest of your day?”

“I often read a little before taking a nap. Drinking promotes napping. I awake before high tea. After supper, I...”

“Read and drink?”

“Yes. Exactly. Then, about nine o’clock I go to bed. I can do this without Jack’s assistance.”

“Very well. My questions are complete. Now I have one question and two items for you.”

“Yes. Go ahead.”

“First, I believe Jack has informed you that I wish to conduct a physical examination. If you will, please be in your bedroom at 2:00 PM, in your night shirt. Will you be embarrassed?”

“I think not. However, my pride will be hurt as I exhibit my scarred body.”

“I assure you, Sir Reginald, there is no need for hurt pride in a medical examination. Now for my first item. Please take two of these tablets. They will help with pain. Give them about twenty minutes to work, and you will not need to consume whiskey or laudanum for the rest of the morning.

“If you bring me water, I’ll do it. You will see a pitcher on the sideboard, next to the whiskey decanter. Please pour a glass of water from it.”

I fetched a glass of water for Sir Reginald. He took it from me and swallowed the tablets.

“I assume you smoke from time to time?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Then here is a pipe, a good briar, which I have filled with a kind of tobacco from America. Please finish it before dinner. This herb should further reduce pain, and may increase your appetite. The only requirement is that you hold the smoke in your lungs as long as you can.”

“A little like opium, I believe, only the pipe is larger. Very well. I have a Lucifer match or two in my waistcoat.”

Sir Reginald lit the pipe and drew in the smoke. After holding it in a few seconds, the smoke rushed out, and he had a period of vigorous coughing. His eyes filled with tears.

“The process will get easier, Sir Reginald.”

“Very well. If you say so.”

“At this point, I will take my leave of you. Please finish the pipe. I shall meet you again at two o’clock.”

With that, I left the library. I counted the interview as a success and went to my day room. I was pleased to see that Meg had already brought in the requested linens, and that Jack had installed a rather elaborate storage cabinet. I noted that it was, in fact, a Thomas Chippendale bookcase with exquisite finials, from approximately 1754. I marveled. Was *everything* in this manor house one hundred years old?

I moved my instruments and medications into the cabinet. I reviewed my notes and added some additional thoughts. I then went to the kitchen in search of Meg.

“Hello, Meg. How is your work?”

“Oh, everything is better-most, Miz Patricia. Today’s dinner has been cooking since early. Care for some tea?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Meg brought a pot and two cups to the table.

“Something smells wonderful! You’re serving Lancashire Hotpot, I believe you said?”

“That and fresh vegetables. And some sliced fruit. And fresh-baked bread, as always.

I poured my own tea, and took a sip.

“How do you make it? Lancashire hotpot.”

“Nothing to it, what with my Castrol stove, or “stew stove,” as it’s sometimes called. I put the ingredients in a crockery pot, set the pot in one of the fire holes, and let it bubble for hours.

“You start with good mutton, potatoes, onions, and a little stock if it’s handy. Wash the mutton and cut it into cubes. Wash the tatties and slice ‘em up. Peel the onions and give them a nice coarse chop. Then I like to fry up the mutton in a little fat. Turns the pieces brown on the outside.

“Into the pot goes everything. Pour in some stock and put in half the potatoes. Nice to add a good lump of butter, as well. Then mix up the mutton and onions and throw ‘em in. Finish up with the other half of the potatoes and another lump of butter. Add some salt and pepper.

“At this point, Miz Pat, you’ve nothing to do but let it simmer for four hours. And that gives me time to do the estate accounts, start my bakin’, and get the fruits and vegetables ready.

“And when young Julia comes from the village to help with the baking, she brings me a bucket of ale from The Black Horse. As the Good Book tells us, ‘the cook doth not live on tea alone.’ Now, I’ll set things up for Sir Reginald’s dinner. You and I can have a bit of food when that’s done and Jack comes in.”

Meg set about making a plate of hotpot and side dishes for Sir Reginald. I noticed that, although she did place the food in serving dishes, she didn’t put them on the serving cart. My reasoning was that she knew Sir Reginald would scarcely touch his lunch, so he simply needed tableware for one.

At precisely 1:00 PM, I noted, she drove the cart down the main hallway to the dining room.

Jack Bates came into the kitchen, and seated himself next to me at the table. He poured himself a pint of ale, and we awaited Meg. We didn’t have long to wait. Meg bounded into the room, and gave us a hearty laugh.

“Ah, Jack, me love, welcome to dinner. I must tell ye both, I am flummoxed!”

“What is it Meg?”

“Sir Reginald is not quite himself. Or, rather, he is better than his usual self.” She laughed again.

I spoke first. “Oh, Meg! Calm your laughter and tell me what happened. Is he all right?”

“Better than all right, Miz Pat. First, when I entered the room, he gave me a jolly greeting: ‘Hello, young tart!’ That is *not at all* like our earl. Then, as I placed his meal upon the table, he giggled! Many times, repeated with each dish being put in front of him. Now what do you make of that?”

“I believe it has something to do with new pain relief medication.”

“Well, there’s more. After some banter, I turns from the table, and he slaps me butt! Har! Jack, you must defend me honor! He slapped me on me bum!”

Jack burst out laughing. “Ah, Meg. I find that you have the most slappable bum in all Kent! I’ll query him as to what technique he used.”

At this moment, the bell rang. Sir Reginald must have pulled the bell rope in the dining room. Meg rushed to see him. She returned a couple of minutes later.

“Now I am doubly flummoxed. Sir Reginald has cleaned his plate and wants another!”

Jack laughed and said, “Best you accommodate him, dear, and do try to keep your bottom out of reach.”

I laughed and said, “Meg, this is a better outcome than I could have hoped for.”

Meg dished up an additional serving of everything and dashed off to put the food in front of Sir Reg. When she returned, she sat down to join us in lunch.

“Well, Miz Pat, whatever you gave him is working. And Jack, you good-for-nothing, while I *did* protect my generous bottom, I gave Sir Reg a giant kiss on the forehead!”

“His reaction?”

“He giggled.”

“Well, my dear wife, I hope you won’t reject my advances, now that our lord and master so favors you.”

“Not likely, Jack. You are the prize bull of Folkestone.”

I ventured to say, “Would you two like to retire to your bedchamber?”

Jack said, “No. Not likely, Miz Pat. We have the barn, the pasture, the forest, the kitchen, and near every room in the manor house in which to answer Cupid’s call.”

“Well, then. Let us take Sir Reginald’s increase in appetite—for food, I mean—as an excellent sign. And I look forward to the two o’clock examination.”

We finished dinner, and truly, the meal was better than anything I had eaten in London. I was personally delighted in learning of Sir Reg’s hearty appetite. The efficacy of the acetylsalicylic acid and marijuana was better than expected!

I returned to my day room, and at 2:00 PM I gathered what paraphernalia I needed, and went to Sir Reginald’s bed chamber.

At the door to Sir Reginald’s room, I knocked. I heard the cry to enter, and upon doing so, I found Sir Reginald in his night shirt, sitting at the edge of his bed.

“Good afternoon, sir.”

“Good afternoon.”

“I have heard that you ate well at dinner.”

“Yes, Nurse Goodman. I cannot account for it.”

“That is no matter. I suspect you will repeat that behavior tomorrow. Now, I see that your nightgown is rather restrictive. I must ask you to remove it.”

“I believe that will be embarrassing. I have modesty issues.”

“I sympathize with you, but I also sympathize with all those houris you have asked to march naked before you. And it seems to me you have bared yourself many times to use latrines—or not—on the battlefield.

“Oh, those ‘virgins’ of the Middle East. Very well, I concede the point.”

With that, he hiked up his night shirt and took it off. I had not seen a naked man, except a corpse or an old soldier, in years. I felt a twitch—so highly unprofessional!—as Sir Reg sat there before me.

“Now, if you will lie face down on the bed, I shall conduct some tests.”

I observed some scars on his mid and lower back, and told him so.

“Sir Reginald, I count eighteen obvious scars on your back. They do not diminish your appearance in any significant way. You are well-formed, in the main, with some loss of muscle and a slight increase in waistline.”

“Well, I must say, no houri ever gave me that appraisal before.”

I ran my hands over the back of his thighs, over his buttocks, and over the interior of his thighs. I imagine I lingered a bit longer there than necessary.

“Do you feel this?”

“Feel what?”

“That, I am afraid, is an answer. You have little sensation in your legs.”

I touched every segment of his back. “Do you feel this?”

“Yes. You are touching my back.”

“This is quite good. You have sensations from your neck and shoulders down to the lowest portions of your back.”

“That is also where my pain lies.”

“My unpleasant answer to you is that soon we shall find exactly where that is.”

“Nurse Goodman, that would be quite cruel. The pain afflicts me when I move.”

“I say to you, Sir Reginald, ‘man up’ to it. I’ve met old soldiers with great fortitude. You have, I do not doubt, that fortitude as well. When we isolate the pain, we can resolve it. Now please turn over.”

He did. By this action, I was nearly undone. I had another view of a nearly perfect body—as perfect as any woman could want. There were some signs of slight atrophy in his legs, but he had a well-formed chest and biceps. His face, of course, was quite lovely. And it was my pleasure to touch him and explore him as it pleased me.

“Sir Reginald, I say this without, I hope, losing my professional posture. You have a well-made body that any woman might envy being close to.”

“Thank you, nurse. I would embrace you, but, as you know, that would come to no good end.”

I listened to Sir Reginald’s heart with my stethoscope and found the beat to be regular and strong. The rate was a little fast, due, I surmised, to the effect of the medications.

I stroked his nipples. They hardened, as might be expected. What was not evident, I hoped, was that my nipples hardened as well. “Can you feel this?”

“Yes, of course.”

I stroked his abdomen. "Can you feel this?"

Yes, of course."

I took a chance. I "bit the bullet," as they say in the army field hospitals. I took his penis in my hand. "Can you feel this?"

"Feel what?"

"That is an answer."

Still, I had an excellent chance to hold a penis in my hands. I could not resist. The same was true of his testicles. Oh, my! May the good Lord forgive me for a professional lapse, but it was a great thrill to do this.

"Sir Reginald, you have well-formed genital organs, but at this point you do not feel them."

"Tell me about it."

"I'm quite sorry, but it is my job to report the good and the ill. Many aspects of your sensory system are in excellent shape. Some are not. What is more dramatic is your control over certain voluntary functions such as excretion."

"And your conclusion, Nurse Goodman?"

"Sir, my prognosis is better than any you have heard over these last ten years. There is no guarantee that you will walk again, and yet there is much promise. I find no signs of disease in your organ systems, nor do I see any deficiency other than paralysis. That is, you cannot feel some things, and you cannot do some things. To put it simply, you look healthy to me."

"And where will this go?"

"It will go in the direction of improving you in every respect. You are by no means at death's door. On the contrary, you have every prospect of gaining health and vitality."

"What about walking?"

"What, indeed? We will address that over the next three weeks. Please cooperate. In fact, your increased appetite at today's dinner was very encouraging."

"I cannot account for it. For the first time in a long time, I felt like eating."

"And so shall you feel tomorrow. Now, let us conclude. I will pass some instructions on to Meg. The substance I put in your pipe is called marijuana and you should smoke another pipe of it before supper. And take two more of the tablets that I will leave in the library. Whether you drink or not is of no concern."

"Very well. And you will be here tomorrow?"

"Of course. I am in your hire, and I plan to work with you daily. I shall attend church on Sunday, for the sake of propriety. Now, I recommend you dress. Keep in mind, Sir Reginald, that you are an appealing patient, due to your excellent physique. Do not, I pray you, lose sight of this. Now, I will leave you."

And with that, I left. I returned to my day room and augmented my notes. I then went to the kitchen, where I was sure to find Meg. Indeed, I found both Meg and Jack here.

“Hello, young lovers!”

“And hello to you, young lady!”

“Sir Reginald’s physical examination has gone very well. If he smokes a pipe of the new medication I have brought him, he will have an excellent appetite at tea.”

“And what of all his giggling?”

“Indeed, I didn’t bring that up to him. Meg, best you be prepared to have your butt slapped again.”

“Hardly a sacrifice, Miz Pat.”

“Jack, if you don’t object, I will walk back to the village, rather than asking to be driven. I want to get my personal things in order, and to enjoy Mrs. Bourne’s high tea. Further, I plan to walk here in the morning.”

“That’s fine, Miz Pat. It’s a beautiful day. You’ll rather like the walk.”

I bid adieu to Jack and Meg and exited the manor house. It was a pleasure to pass under the beeches in the drive. A carpet of bluebells bloomed under them.

As I turned east into Barnhurst Lane, I saw ahead of me only a lone buckboard with a single driver. I chanced to glance behind me and was a bit startled. There was, in the distance, a pedestrian. While I could not make out his face, his outfit—all black—was quite distinguishable. Uriah Grimstead.

Incredibly, he seemed, for a change, not to be in a hurry. He sauntered. *Well, I thought, at least he is able to move slowly when taking the air and looking for inspiration to write poetry.*

At the end of Barnhurst Lane, very much the northern limit of the village, I turned into the Canterbury Road. At the corner was the postal and telegraph office, which I entered.

“Hello!”

“Ah, yes. Hello, Mrs. Goodman. I am Sam Fowler, the manager of this facility.”

Mr. Fowler was short and round, with scarcely any hair upon his head. As if in compensation, he sported enormous handlebar moustaches. He gave me a smile that seemed to cover his entire face.

“I’m very pleased to meet you, Mr. Fowler. You know who I am?”

“Indeed. On three counts. First, all Hawkinge knows who you are. Second, you are wearing an outfit suitable for nursing, it seems. And third, I have a letter for you.”

“Wonderful. May I have it?”

“Yes. Let’s see. Ah! Here it is.”

“Why it’s from my mother, in Kew. Thank you. Now, if you will excuse me, I must hurry off.”

“Well, do check in again. We sort the mail two times daily, excepting Sundays. Also, this is where you drop off posts. I’m sorry to tell you that we cannot collect from the houses in the village, as I am the entire staff.”

“Yes, I’ll keep that in mind.”

“And of course, should you need to send a telegram, I’m your man. But you would know that from talking with Mr. Grimstead, your fellow boarder.”

“No. He and I have spoken only twice, and both times were quite brief.”

“Oh, well, just ask him. He’s my most steady customer.”

“Really?”

“Oh, yes. Since he arrived in Hawkinge two months ago, he has made it his habit to come in quite frequently. I don’t know where a poor poet gets his funds, but he has money to spend on telegrams. He sends the telegrams in a kind of poetry.”

“Ah, Mr. Fowler, that is most curious. And I’ll be sure to call on you when there’s a need to for a telegram.”

With that, I took my leave. I glanced at The Black Horse pub on the opposite side of the road, and determined not to investigate it today. I saw two grocery establishments next to The Black Horse. From their signs, I noted that the first sold greens, while the second sold dry goods. I decided to put off a visit until another day.

I continued down the road and past the blacksmith. Fortunately, neither was the weather too warm, nor the road too dusty. As I approached Oak Lane, very much the southern boundary of the village, Mrs. Bourne exited The White Horse pub. She carried a bucket.

I crossed the road to meet her. For the first time, I noted that she was scarcely older than I, slim and rather attractive.

“Hello, Mrs. Bourne!”

“Hello, Mrs. Goodman! Are you free for the day?”

“Yes, and it has been a most excellent day.”

“Then walk with me to the house. I’d like you to join me in a pint of ale from this bucket.”

“I’d be happy to. You know, in London, a woman would never enter a pub unescorted.”

“Ah, it’s quite different in Hawkinge, you know.”

We walked perhaps a hundred paces on Oak Lane to arrive at the boarding house. As we entered, I said, “Now, I must only change from my uniform into more suitable clothing.”

"That's fine, dearie. Meet me in my kitchen, if you will."

The time was about half three. I went to my rooms and quickly changed into a day dress. I descended the stairs, walked to the kitchen, and there saw Mrs. Bourne and a pleasant-looking boy of about eleven years. The young fellow was quite lean and had an unmanageable shock of red hair.

"Hello one more time, Mrs. Bourne."

"Do come in, Mrs. Goodman. And you must call me Betty. This isn't London, you know."

"Excellent. Please call me Patricia, if you will."

"Now, have a seat. You've not met my son. This here is Master Frank Edward Bourne."

"Pleased to meet you, Frank."

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am."

"Do you go to school?"

"Yes, ma'am. Here in the village. But that's over for today. Now, mum will make me do chores."

"What will you do with your schooling, young man?"

"I can't say, ma'am. Mum tells me I must go, or I'll end up an ignorant bumpkin. She wants me to be better-most. Y'see, I plan to be a soldier. I'm going to be brave and get me a Victoria Cross."

"My husband, God rest his soul, was a soldier. He was wounded at the Battle of Inkerman."

"Oh, sorry, ma'am. Sir Reginald was a soldier, and so are all of Mrs. Bates' sons! And Sir Reginald has a VC."

Mrs. Bourne interjected, "You'll probably get your bum shot off, young man. Now, my boy, please be about bringing in more wood for the stove."

Mrs. Bourne poured two generous glasses of ale. "There you go, Patricia. Ale from The White Horse. Best in Kent, in me humble opinion."

"What about the ale from The Black Horse?"

"Good, too! If the truth be known, it's very much the same ale. Y'see, Nick Bowles owns The Black Horse and Ned Bowles owns The White Horse. And they're identical twins."

I took a sip. "Very good ale!"

"Indeed. It's a brown ale, made with darker barley malt. Some say ye shouldn't make a 'hoppy' ale, but that's what we do in Kent, as hops are our main crop. The Black Horse brews it strong and dark. The White Horse ale is a bit more pale. Myself, I like a dark, strong Scotch ale, but that's to be found only in Scotland."

"You certainly know your ales."

"I should, Patricia. My husband, dear Angus, was a hop farmer here in Hawkinge. And a Scot. Good Lord, I miss that man."

"You mean he's...?"

"In the cold, cold ground. Died on a sea voyage in a storm. He once had typhoid, the same affliction that struck Charles Darwin, the naturalist. Caught it on another sea voyage, just like Darwin. But he survived that, only to be taken from me on a short voyage from here to Scotland."

"So you gave up the hop farm?"

"Indeed. Sold it and bought this fine house. I keep a small plot of special hops, a variety my husband developed. What with the money from the farm, and taking in boarders, I get by fine. And I supply the Bowles brothers with a bit of what they call pub grub."

"And they give you ale?"

"Yes. And... confidentially, a bit more, dear. A good, conservative, Anglican widow would never admit it, but those boys are fun! Always wanting to give me a toss, and succeeding more often than not!

"Oh, Mrs. Bourne! Oh, Betty! Both of them?"

"Well, not at the same time. We haven't tried that—yet. So you see, sometimes I must leave my house at night to help one of the boys close the pub. There we play 'darts.' Only I'm the target and the dart is long, warm, and velvety."

"My! This is a lively town, it would appear. Does anyone know?"

"Probably everyone, but nobody talks. I'm a widow, a mother, a churchwarden, and a property owner. They won't be throwing dung, and if they ever did, I'd just say 'Od Rabbit It'—which isn't a very nice Kentish expression, to be sure."

I took a sip of beer.

"Now, tell me, Patricia, how was your first day with Sir Reginald?"

"Very good, Betty! Excellent, in fact. I obtained information about his health, examined him carefully, and provided him with new medications. Also, his appetite improved remarkably."

"So tell me, what's it like to examine an earl?"

"Very much like examining an old soldier or a child from the workhouse, except that Sir Reginald is very good looking and a pleasure to touch."

"I understand he is paralyzed."

"Yes, partially. So I got more pleasure from the touching than he did. Note well, this is very unseemly nursing behavior."

"Oh dearie, no more unseemly than my cavorting with two pub owners. It strikes me as quite right for you to view and touch Sir Reg's afflicted parts."

I finished my ale.

“Betty, this has been a wonderful chat. You are quite warm, and candid, too, if I may say so. Please tell Mr. Bowles, whichever one you encounter next, how much I love the ale!”

“My pleasure, Patricia. Now be sure to come to tea. It’s at five o’clock.”

With that, we said our goodbyes, and I returned to my rooms. There, I unpacked my trunks before my dresses were totally spoiled. I laid out a nurse’s uniform for the morrow.

I unpacked and organized my personal things as well, including the contents of my lady’s bag. I tucked Sir Michael, my beautiful revolver, carefully into a bureau drawer.

I couldn’t help but feel a wave of satisfaction. I was establishing my new home, with that process coming at the end of a very successful day at Folkestone Manor.

Having placed my journals and some leaves of stationery on the table, I sat down to write.

First, I read my mother’s letter. She wrote:

Dear Little Pitty-Pat!

This note should coincide with your arrival in Hawkinge. I hope your journey was pleasant and uneventful, featuring no suspicious strangers, drunken sailors, or attacks from Maoris or Zulus.

By separate post, I am sending you a tin of Eccles cakes, one of your favorites, made by Bridget.

Trusting that this meets you in the best of health, and sending you all my love,

Mama

P.S. I have met a nice man. Distinguished, pleasant, and well off, but of course hardly the equal of your dear father. Bridget disapproves of him, which I take as a very good sign.

Now *that*, I noted, was the way my mother wrote letters. Short, pleasant, and with a stunning news item at the end. I wondered who this man might be.

I dashed off a response.

13th instant, June, 1865

Mrs. Elizabeth Richardson
№ 41 Gloucester Road
Kew, Richmond

Dear Mother,

Thank you most kindly for your note! I fetched it from the postal office on this, my first day here.

I look forward to the cakes, and I especially look forward to hearing more about the man you have discovered.

Sending you all my love, I remain,

Your devoted daughter Patricia (Pitty-Pat, if you must)

Now, it was time for tea. As the clock struck five, I entered the dining room.

Frank was seated at the table and I joined him. Mrs. Bourne entered with a tureen. At that point, in a rush, Mr. Grimstead came in.

“Oh, dear! I hope I’m not late, to be sure.”

“Not at all, Mr. Grimstead. Please seat yourself. Here we have a lovely oxtail soup, with plenty of carrots, parsnips, potatoes, tomato, and mushrooms. And a good bit of oxtail, I should point out. Now, serve yourself—no, you wait until last, Frank—and I’ll bring out kippers, Cheshire cheese, bread, and butter. And, of course, the tea.”

Tea was quite pleasant, and I was in the mood to engage Mr. Grimstead in conversation.

“How long you been in Hawkinge, Mr. Grimstead?”

“About two months, to be sure.”

“I presume you find the Kentish countryside to be an inspiration for your work.”

“Yes, I walk about every day.”

“Are any of the local sights particularly stimulating?”

“I think not. One meadow is very much like another.”

I was silent. Mr. Grimstead, I found, was hardly effusive or colorful in his speech. I suddenly yearned to hear some of his poems.

“Do you ever read your poems to others?”

“At the moment, no, to be sure. I am posting them to my, er..., publisher in London. Soon, there will be a volume of them.”

“Oh, I look forward to buying a copy.”

“That will be impossible. The printing is for a limited circle of special people in London.”

Again, I was silent. Now Mr. Grimstead spoke.

“You have begun your work for Sir Reginald Pleydell, I believe.”

“Why, yes. Although I arrived from London only today, I felt it best to begin work immediately. And, if I may say so, the work is quite satisfying.”

“How so?”

“Whenever one in my profession ministers to the ill or injured, the work is satisfying.”

“And how is Mr. Pleydell’s health?”

“Very good, I can say. Any additional detail would be a confidential matter between Sir Reginald and his physician.”

Once again, I was silent. I concentrated on my meal. When concluded, I excused myself, mentioning to Betty Bourne that I was likely to miss breakfast, as I wanted to arrive early at Folkestone Manor.

I went to my rooms, picked up my Verne novel, and left the house. My intention was to spend some leisure time in the public park.

To walk to the park, I crossed Oak Lane and went through the field behind The White Horse. The next road was Church Street, and the park was in sight. The park was really more of a meadow, not at all like the well-manicured parks and gardens of the fine manor houses of England. It featured a sprinkling of older trees and a carpet of bluebells.

I settled myself at the base of an ancient English oak. I had scarcely read two pages when I was approached by a young girl.

“Hello!”

She was a child, or young woman, I should say, of perhaps thirteen or fourteen years, with a bright face and very blond hair. I can only describe her demeanor as “bouncy.”

“Hello, young lady.”

“You’re Mrs. Goodman, the nurse, aren’t you?”

“Why, yes. It seems that the whole village knows me. And who are you?”

“I’m Julia Prang. Dr. Prang is my father.”

“And are you the same Julia who helps Meg Bates?”

Yes, ma’am. That’s me. I’m at Folkestone Manor every day to help with the baking, and I bring some of the food back to the village. I’ve got a wicker pony cart that my father lets me drive.”

“That must be great fun.”

“Oh, yes ma’am, it is. I’m the envy of all the boys. Well, at least, until they grow older and are given farm wagons to drive.”

“Do you go to school?”

“Yes, but mostly I am taught at home by my father. He’s very smart, you know.”

“I’m quite sure. I should like to meet him soon. “

“You’ll like him. He knows everything.”

“Indeed! Tell me, what will you do when you are a grown woman?”

“I’m almost grown now. I’m fourteen years old.”

“Yes, but I mean when you are an old woman of, say, eighteen?”

“Nobody knows this, but you’re new in the village, and I can tell you a secret. I want to be a famous cook.”

“Really, like Mrs. Bates?”

“Well, she’s very good, but she’s not famous, except in Hawkinge.”

“And how will you become a famous cook?”

“I will go to France. My father has taught me lots of French. And Mrs. Bates has taught me lots of cooking from *The Art of Cookery made Plain and Easy* and from *Mrs. Beeton’s Book of Household Management*. And I have read Elizabeth Acton’s book, *Modern Cookery for Private Families*. But I have also recently read the works of Marie-Antoine Carême, especially his definition of the ‘mother sauces.’ So I’m eager to go and learn more.”

“And then?”

“Then I will be called a *chef de cuisine*. I suppose I shall cook for the King of France or some other nobleman.”

“Then, so you shall, I’m sure. I wish you well, young lady.”

Julia danced off. After that, I completed only six more pages of Verne. The sun was setting, and I returned to my rooms.

There, I shed all my clothing, donned my lovely kimono, and lit a lamp. I poured myself a glass of port from the bottle I had purchased in London.

For the next two hours, I was largely the model of a dignified Englishwoman of the era of Victoria. I wrote letters to Agnes Jones, and to Mr. Leonard and Mr. Bruce, the book sellers. I then made notes in both my medical and personal journals. After these tasks, I spent some time studying Gray’s descriptive anatomy book. I determined to take my medical journal and Gray’s to the manor, so that I could devote a part of each day to reading and writing.

At last, it was time for sleep. I removed my kimono and stood before the looking glass. This clearly was *not* the behavior of a dignified Englishwoman of the era of Victoria. I studied my nude body, something I seemed to be doing frequently these days. I rather liked it.

“For an old woman of 29, you’ve still got it, girl.”

I ran my hands over my body and thought, “You might as well do this, as no one else is likely to do so. You have neither a Jack Bates, as does Meg, nor the Bowles brothers, as does Betty Bourne.”

I felt remarkably fine. I judged my first day in Kent to be a success. With a smile, I extinguished the lamp. And so to bed.