

12. A Most Lively Three Days

Friday, July 7, 1865

I rose early on Friday and looked out my windows. The day, I could see, was exceedingly fine. Neither a nurse's uniform nor a dress would do for the day's work, so I found the outfit Meg had lent me for gardening.

Eager to complete preparations for the operation, I fairly rushed to the kitchen.

"Good morning, Meg! And oh, good morning Julia!"

"Good morning, Mrs. Goodman. I'm making fruit pies today."

"Well, they will be lovely, I'm sure. I believe you do cakes and biscuits as well."

"Yes, of course, but today I cannot locate all the pans."

"I know why, child. They are needed elsewhere. But next week, I shall buy replacements from London—in copper, if you like."

"Oh, Mrs. Goodman, copper is the best!"

"I have one favor to ask you, young lady: When you leave today, please ask Mr. Fowler if there's a telegram for me. Further, will you check again early tomorrow? If there is, you must drive here immediately with it."

"Of course! For copper pans, I'd drive to Inverness in my pony cart, and that's 640 miles."

Meg asked, "So what shall we do today, Nurse?"

"Meg, let us go out to Jack's smithy and see to the trolley. Then, we merely sit down and review all that we have done. You see, the one remaining hurdle we face is receiving the phenol."

"Just the same, Patricia, I see that you're dressed for farm work, so at the least we'll take a trip to the garden for flowers and herbs."

With that, Meg and I left Julia and repaired to the barn. We found Jack in his shop, surrounded by the tools of the joiner and blacksmith.

"How goes it, my handsome man?"

"Fine, my lovely wife."

"How goes it, handsome Colour Sergeant?"

"Ho! This from our sophisticated city girl, Mrs. Goodman!"

"I mean it, Jack. You are the most robust man I have ever met, and your beard must be the envy of all in the County of Kent."

"Forget her girlish admirations," Meg said. "Tell us what progress there is on Sir Reg's trolley."

“Look here. It is perfected, if I may say so. The wheels are attached and they turn smoothly. Perfect for a journey of only forty paces down the hall and back again.”

All being well, Meg and I went to the garden, where we picked flowers for the bedrooms and library. “Meg, what herbs shall I pick?”

“Get fresh rosemary for the chicken. That’s dinner. But take from the other species as well. I’ll be drying them against the winter; and picking them keeps the overgrowth down.”

We returned to the kitchen. While Julia baked, Meg began to prepare dinner. Being of little use there, I said my goodbyes and returned to my day room. There, I reviewed all lists of preparations. Somewhat against my will, I consulted the anatomy books to see dissections of the lower back. I rejected an urge to write Florence Nightingale about my concerns; as such a letter would only amount to an unbecoming exposition of worry, fear, and panic. Of course, at nine o’clock I paid Sir Reg a brief visit in the library.

Dinner was pleasant, but I scarcely remember the meal. Some sort of meat (oh yes, Meg had mentioned chicken), some sort of potato dish, and some sort of vegetable. I rather enjoyed Julia’s cherry pie. I was quiet, and merely picked at my food.

My afternoon was no better. Neither study nor reading helped. At two I went to Sir Reg’s bedroom to provide a massage. However, love him as I might, I felt little attraction to his body today. I was supremely concerned about touching his lower back carelessly.

I spent a portion of the afternoon going over the lists of preparations with Meg. Then, returning for tea, I rather plopped down in my chair. “Oh, Meg, I believe that I am exhausted.”

“Well, there’s little left that we can do.”

“Yes, I know. You are right, as always. We only await the phenol. My condition appears to be based more on worry than fatigue. I’m nervous.”

Meg paused, and then gave me what I shall call a sly look. “Perhaps I can suggest something quite relaxing and diverting. But first, have some vegetable soup with bread and butter. ‘It will cure what ails ya,’ my mother always said.”

I ate. “Something diverting? I would welcome it.”

“The exercise requires an open mind.”

“I have that.”

“Then, come to the hallway at seven o’clock. As you know, our room is just across the hall from the kitchen door. Wear only your kimono, and I shall be dressed in a similar manner.”

“What will we do?”

“We’ll have a drink in the kitchen and go straightaway to the barn.”

“And then what?”

“We’ll engage in some bold country sport. I can promise you that you will come away from it feeling *much* better.”

I was intrigued. There was nothing for me to do but go to my bedroom and await the hour of 7:00 PM.

Just before seven, I dressed—or undressed, rather—to Meg’s specification.

In the hall stood Meg. She wore a simple linen robe. I was struck by how good she looked, *sans* her normal frock and apron. The curvy flare of her breasts and hips was quite obvious. I supposed the same was true of me, for indeed, I have no smallish build.

“Ah! Are you ready?”

“Yes. For what, of course, I cannot imagine.”

We went to the kitchen, where Meg poured us each a nice portion of Old Bushmill’s. “Here you go. Here’s to Bushmill’s. It’s good for the bush.”

“You mean...? Oh, yes, to be sure!”

“The toast works fine, except for Betty Bourne, who has no bush.”

“Yes, she’s quite bare, but how did you know that?”

“My dear, everyone in Hawkinge knows that. Now let’s get ourselves to the barn.”

“Where’s Jack? Is he coming?”

“I assure you, he will make an appearance very shortly.

With that, we traversed the short distance from the manor house to the barn. The night had not yet grown cool, and the daylight had not quite disappeared, so I felt no chill. In the barn, by the light of two lanterns, I saw an arrangement in the central area, away from the stalls and near the tack room. There was spread upon the floor a large, well-padded quilt. In addition, I saw various ropes and pulleys whose purpose I could not divine. Most curious of all was a leather device, suspended from a hook in the beams by four chains. It looked rather like a child’s swing.

“Now turn, and I’ll help you out of your robe.” I did so. Meg folded it and placed it over one of the stall rails. She then did the same with hers.

I must say, I marveled at Meg. Although she was perhaps fifteen years older than I, she had a magnificent body. Her breasts were larger than mine, as were her hips.

“Why Meg, you are quite beautiful.”

“Why thank you, Patricia. And me having borne four boys. I figure it must be due to country living and having a very attentive husband. I might say that you look good, yourself.”

“Well, I too long for the opportunity to bear four sons and have an attentive husband. What will happen next?”

“Jack, whom we will call ‘Master Jack,’ will give us some sport. He’ll do nothing that he hasn’t done to me before, or that I haven’t done to him. Now kneel on the quilt and hold your hands out in front of you.”

I did so. Meg bound my wrists together with a silk cord. She produced another one for herself. She, too, kneeled, and held the cord, ready for her own wrists to be tied.

From the fading daylight outside the barn boomed a voice: “Master Jack is here!”

A character appeared in the barn doorway. It was a figure wearing a wide, black Spanish cordobés style hat. He wore a black cape that cascaded to the floor, and tall black boots, as well. In one hand he had a riding crop. Like a highwayman, he sported a mask over his eyes.

He reminded me a bit of one of the California caballeros that Richard Henry Dana had described in *Two Years Before the Mast*. He removed his hat and cape. Indeed, there was little else to remove. He otherwise wore only his knee-length riding boots, and a wide leather belt around his middle.

What an admirable man! Where my Michael had been quite lean, Jack was large and solid. He was wide, but seemed to be all muscle. Of course, his full beard was as wild as ever. I looked between his legs, and suddenly it became very clear to me why Meg enjoyed her romps with him.

Meg: “Welcome, Master Jack.” She looked at me.

“Welcome, Master Jack.”

“Ah, someone new. Well, we shall make the most of it.”

With that, he used Meg’s cord to bind her wrists. From above her, he brought a rope with a hook, which passed over a pulley in the beam, and hooked it to her wrist binding. He gave the rope a gentle tug, causing Meg’s arms to rise over her head. With more tugs, she was forced to stand. When she was on tiptoes, Jack tied the rope.

He moved to me, and performed the same actions. “Now I shall look more closely at my charges.”

Jack circled Meg and me. He stopped in front of me and gave me a gentle kiss on the cheek. The feeling was quite pleasant. Simultaneously, he gently pressed his palm to the place between my legs.

“Oooh!” No man had touched me there since my Michael. I could not help but let out a small moan.

He moved to Meg, and kissed and touched her in the same way. He then moved behind me, and I felt his penis nestle between my buttocks. Two hands encircled me, and took my breasts.

He spent some time lifting them and letting them fall, as if testing their weight. He squeezed them gently. But most significantly, he gently squeezed and pulled on my nipples. I couldn’t contain my moans.

“Ah, very good! Now, react to this!”

I felt hands on my vulva. Only a second later, a finger entered me, parting my labia minora, and locating my clitoris. While one finger dwelt on my clitoris, another finger from Jack’s other hand penetrated my vagina. Now my moaning was uncontrollable.

“Ah! Your sounds are as they should be. If you are good, all will go well for you. But if you are cross, you will feel *this!*”

Oh! I felt his crop across my buttocks! It stung, but curiously, the blow only heightened the feelings.

Jack returned to my front, where he lifted each breast in turn to suck upon it. He not only sucked, but he nipped each nipple with his teeth. This was more than I could stand.

“Oh, I must have more!”

“Patience, my dear! Your turn will come.”

With that, he untied the rope and lowered me to my knees. He went to Meg and repeated his actions, producing largely the same results. When he was done with her, rear and front, he lowered her to her knees, too. Jack moved directly in front of her.

Meg: “Now, Patricia, you will profit from this lesson.”

Jack: “Shall I tell ye what to do?”

“No, Master Jack. I know.” With that, she extended her bound hands to cup his bollocks. Drawing him to her, she licked his penis from base to top. Many times.

“Ah, yes! That’s it!”

I saw her extend her tongue to the head of his rod, and lick it all around. From there, she took it into her mouth. Down she went, and in it went. She moved up and down. I had not seen another do this, although I was very familiar with the procedure, having practiced it many times with Michael. And then I saw the most startling thing.

Just when I thought Meg’s mouth could hold no more of the giant penis, it went *deeper* into her mouth. This was impossible, I thought.

“Oh, Meg!”

Meg removed her mouth and said, “Nothing to it, dearie. Just relax, and this tool will go deep into your throat.”

At this point, Jack gave Meg a kiss on the forehead and moved to me. I did my best to imitate her—grasping his balls, licking the shaft, and working it up and down in my mouth. When I attempted to take it all in, I must say I was gagging.

“You’re not relaxing, dear. Try again.”

On the second time, I was more successful. In fact, I felt a bit deprived when Master Jack removed himself from my mouth. His penis pointed toward the ceiling. Its head was bright red and fairly throbbing.

Jack was breathing fast. “Good! All that is as it should be.”

With that, he moved to Meg, and untied her wrists.

“To the sling.”

Meg complied. She lay face down upon the sling. Jack tucked up her knees and brought her hands back. At this point, he bound her wrists to her ankles. She fully presented her bum to Jack, while her face fell into a gap in the sling.

“Now, ye are nearly set, my Meg. I’ll pull yer bubbies through the hole.” Indeed, holes had been cut to allow Meg’s enormous breasts to dangle below the sling. I wondered what good purpose this might serve. I needed wait only seconds to find out.

Jack approached Meg’s wide open vulva, and reached around her to grab her breasts. He not only rubbed them (to Meg’s increasing moans), but use them to pull her to him.

Jack freed one breast from his grip and inserted two fingers into Meg. “You’re as ready as you’ll ever be.”

“Yes, Master Jack. I am.” With that, Jack entered her, driving in his long, wide penis. He followed with stroke after stroke. At this point, he released Meg’s breasts and grabbed the chains of the sling to make the task easier.

With each stroke, Meg cried, “Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!”

After a brief time, Jack, whose own moans had risen, rammed his penis into her to the hilt. I swear that Meg fairly screamed. They hung together in space for a short time, breathing hard.

Jack said, slowly, “And that, Miz Patricia, is how we do it in Hawkinge.” With that, Jack withdrew from Meg, untied her, and gave her a long kiss. He bade her stand at the head of the sling.

He turned to me, untied my hands, and led me to the sling.

“Now you shall lie on your back.” I did so, after which Jack tied my wrists to my ankles, leaving me quite exposed.

“Will you do the same thing to me, Master Jack?”

“I think not. I have taken an oath to put my willie only into Meg.”

“Oh Jack, be gracious! I don’t mind.” But with that, Jack went to her rear and gave her a good blow with his crop.

“Quiet, you! No, I have something nearly as good. Now first, Meg, you take hold of her thruppenny bits.” Meg grasped my breasts firmly, gently using her thumb and two fingers to rub and harden my nipples.

Master Jack inserted a finger in me, and then a second one. My breaths came more quickly. Then he kneeled and used his tongue to lick my clitoris and his teeth to nip at it. I did more than moan—I fairly panted. How long it had been since a man had done this!

Jack then produced an instrument from a bag. It was a large object, clearly made of rubber, in the form of a penis and bullocks. “Now, for the diletto, from Italy.”

“Please, please, Master Jack. Put it in me!” Jack inserted the device, and pushed it in halfway.

“Now, Meg, pull her your way.” Meg did so. As she tugged on my breasts, the dildo came mostly out. When she pushed back, it went in deep again.

Now Master Jack set to work in earnest. In addition to Meg’s rocking, he worked the dildo, inserting it deeply and twisting it as it suited him. As I grew more out of breath, he returned his tongue to my clitoris. As he sensed my climax, he continued his licking and thrust the diletto all the way in.

“AIIIIIEEE!” I swear I screamed as I had never done before. My hips fairly hung in the air.

After a few moments, Jack gently withdrew the object. Meg gave me a lovely kiss on the forehead, and Jack did so on my lips. After that, Meg untied me and helped me up. Master Jack, it appeared, had donned his cape and hat and left the barn.

Meg said, “Come, my dear. Let’s dress and return to the kitchen.” I helped her with her robe and she with my kimono. Rather unsteadily, we walked from the barn to the kitchen.

“What do we do now, Meg?”

“What we always do after such a session. Have a cup of tea.”

In a few minutes the pot was ready. Jack came in.

“Why, Jack! Where have you been?”

“Oh, nowhere in particular, Meg. Just out and about the estate.”

“We met a fellow in the barn who looked much like you. Except that he had a much bigger roger.”

Jack laughed heartily. “Indeed! Well, I’ll have to meet him some day.”

After our tea, there was little to say or do. I thanked both Meg and Jack profusely, gave them each a long hug, and walked to my bedroom. I must say, I was glowing. My body tingled as it had not done in years! With great contentment, I went to bed and slept soundly.

Saturday, July 8, 1865

Morning! I awoke to daylight filling my room. There were no direct rays, as my room was situated on the north side of the manor. It would be an understatement to say that I felt wonderful!

I had barely donned my kimono whence came a knock at my door. It was but seven o’clock. “Who is it?”

“It’s me, Julia, Nurse Goodman. Please let me in!” I opened the door and in came Julia. She was not yet covered with flour, so I deduced that the day’s baking hadn’t yet begun.

“What is it, dear?”

“I brought a telegram for you from Mr. Fowler.”

I tore it open, and found it to contain excellent news. I gave her a big hug. “Ah! This is important. Thank you, dear Julia. Tell Meg I’ll come to the kitchen in just a few minutes.”

I arrived at the kitchen, quickly. "Good morning, Meg. Where's Jack?"

"And good morning to you. He's in the barn. Why?"

"Look, it's a telegram from the Folkestone West station to Sam Fowler. The carbolic acid from Rexford Aull, the apothecary, has arrived!"

"Excellent! You tell Jack and I'll set out a pot of tea."

And so I did. I dashed to the barn. Once there I noticed, incidentally, no evidence of the unusual tack I had seen the evening before. "Oh, Jack! Look at this telegram. The carbolic acid is here. Can we take the wagon to the railway station?"

"Of course, Patricia. That is very important, and I have errands to do in town as well. I'll come fetch you when all is in readiness."

I returned to the kitchen for a cup of tea. "Wonderful tea, Meg. And the day has begun with excellent news."

"And what of last night?"

"Oh, my! I confess, it was perhaps the best night I've had since I lost my Michael. Tell me again, how did you describe it?"

"As something quite relaxing and diverting."

"It was that, indeed! I'm still glowing."

Jack came to the kitchen and proposed we depart for Folkestone right away.

"Here's a small list of items, my good husband. If, that is, you don't object to fetching some groceries."

"No more than I object to eating what you cook." He glanced at Julia. "And what will you bake today, young lady."

"Oh, Mr. Bates, today is the day for tarts and pastries, especially French pastries. Upon your return, you will think you've stumbled into a *pâtisserie* in Paris. In particular I will make Napoleons, also called *mille-feuilles*."

Jack and I set off in the wagon, and on our drive I explained what was needed today. "Jack, when we return, I will set about mixing the phenol with water to make disinfectant. Will you be able to roust the groundsmen so that we may scrub down our surgical room?"

"That will be no problem, Patricia. They were already alerted to the prospect."

I gave Jack a sly look. "I'm sorry you couldn't join Meg and me last night. We had a wonderful time, but I'm sworn to secrecy, and cannot divulge the details."

Jack laughed. "Indeed, I understand. Well, should I ever meet the man that looks a bit like me, I'll query him." We took the Canterbury Road quite all the way into Folkestone, turning right into the Cheriton Road. In two minutes, we were at the railway station.

I marveled at how much had happened since my arrival at this station on June 6th. But I had no time to muse. Jack drove us to the end of the depot where freight was received and walked with me to the agent's window. With little ado, we were directed to a crate addressed to me, and Jack set it in the wagon.

"Now, my good nurse, we have three errands to do before we head home." We drove the Cheriton Road to Radnor Park West. "That park you see there is named after the Earls of Radnor, of which Sir Reg is the latest. Ah, here we are at the Wilton Road."

I was impressed at the stretch of fresh green meadow and substantial trees in this urban park. I noticed, as well, that the houses surrounding it were rather impressive, in both their size and the complexity of their architecture. While most were framed half-timbered articles, a few were made of brick or stone. One featured columns of marble, offsetting red brick.

Jack pulled the buckboard to a halt in front of an unpretentious, but rather large, three-story house. I could see from the street the suggestion of a substantial garden and orchard behind the estate's walls. A woman in her middle years appeared on the porch. She had hair uniformly gray and wore a severe black dress with a great deal of black lace, but no adornment whatsoever.

"Ay, Gianni! Buongiorno, il mio amico!"

"Good morning to you, Mrs. Zamboni!"

"Mrs. Zamboni?" I whispered to Jack.

"Of course."

"But Jack, isn't this house rather grand for an iceman?"

"You will soon learn why."

Jack and I ascended the porch steps. "Mrs. Zamboni, may I present to you Nurse Patricia Goodman, who is working to improve the health of Sir Reginald."

"Ah, yes. I'ma hearda this *signora*. Your Margherita she tella my Luigi."

"And Mrs. Goodman, may I present Mrs. Viola Zamboni, also known as Countess Da Gamba."

Mrs. Zamboni extended her hand and said in perfect 'Oxford' English. "Ah, Mrs. Goodman. It is indeed a pleasure to meet you. I trust that all goes well with Sir Reginald Pleydell."

It took me a moment to recover. "Why, yes Mrs., er, Countess, er, Contessa. He is well and grows better every day."

"Try 'Viola,' my dear. It's much simpler."

"But, but, but..."

"You are surprised, *può essere*, to find me here in Folkestone, married to a humble iceman? I will say this: love has no interest in money or titles. And that, *signora*, is our complete story."

"But your speech..."

“Girton College, Cambridge. I use the *paesano* talk mostly for fun.”

“Mr. Zamboni is a very lucky man.”

“And I a lucky woman, too. Now step in. Jack, I have items for Meg.

Viola conducted us to her kitchen. It was truly gigantic in size, more than twice the size of Meg’s. On one of the tables, a large wicker basket awaited us.

“Oh, Mrs., er, Viola, this is a wonderful kitchen!”

“Yes, I think so. When I was a little girl, we were taught only two things—making the *bambini* and working in *la cucina*. That is, making babies and cooking. Now, one of my children is in business, four others are at university and my youngest is at Rugby School in Warwickshire. That leaves me free for cooking and *fare l’amore*.

“Here we have the pasta. I made it yesterday, and it has dried. This is called *linguini*. The pot contains my *salsa marinara*, a sauce for the pasta. There is also another *salame*, since Meg liked the last one, and a bottle of *olio di oliva*—olive oil. Oh, and I’ve put in two bottles of Chianti, wine from my Tuscany. Well, what with unification, I suppose I should refer to it as Italy. No matter, it’s good wine.”

Jack thanked Viola, bowing slightly and showing his best Sergeant Major form, and took the basket to our wagon. She and I exchanged a kiss, and we were on our way.

Mrs. Zamboni waved. “*Ciao*. And you watcha you assa!” We laughed!

Jack said, “Miz Patricia, we now have but two errands left to do. I hope you’re not alarmed about the time we are taking.”

“Oh, no, Jack! Not at all. It’s early, and our work with the phenol won’t be time-consuming. I’m very much enjoying this tour of Folkestone.”

We drove via Radnor Park Avenue, passing more fine homes, turned into the Pavilion Road, and returned to the Canterbury Road. Very soon, we pulled up in front of a shop clearly marked, “Andrew Wilson, Meats, Poultry, &c.”

When we entered, the proprietor greeted us. “Ah, Jack Bates! Welcome!”

“Good to see you, Andrew. How is your leg?”

“Fine, Jack. It bothers me only in wet weather, which, mercifully, is past us for a few months.”

“Mrs. Goodman, this here is Andrew Wilson, the leading purveyor of beef in Folkestone. I knew him as Sergeant Wilson, before he had the good fortune to meet up with a Russian musket ball.”

We shook hands. “I’m pleased to meet you, Mr. Wilson.”

“Andrew, this is Mrs. Patricia Goodman, the nurse attending to Sir Reg. She is well known in Hawkinge.”

“And also here. ‘Pop goes the weasel.’ Right, Mrs. Goodman?”

I turned several shades of scarlet. "Oh! I see that not everything that happens in Hawkinge stays in Hawkinge."

"Not when your son is Billy Wilson, who plays piano at The Black Horse on Saturday nights."

"Oh! I see! Well, please thank him for the rousing accompaniment he provided."

"Andrew, have you the note that Meg sent to you?"

"Yes, of course. Wait a moment while I fetch your joint."

He returned. "Here it is. A roast of beef ribs, with all seven in place. It's a beauty."

"Thank you kindly. We must be off now, as there are still errands to do."

"Very well! My best to your wife. I can see who is the Sergeant Major of the family now."

Jack nodded and they had a good laugh. "It's true in all marriages, I think."

We drove only a bit farther in the Canterbury Road, in the direction of Hawkinge, before Jack halted in front of another shop. It was part of a string of purveyors' shops, all in one building. Again, the object of our business was easy to identify by the shop's sign, "H. Sanderson's Pie and Chicken House."

We alighted and entered. Behind the counter I found a tall, lean man in a white suit. He wore spectacles, and perhaps his most distinctive characteristic was his head of snowy white hair, with a goatee to match.

Jack went straight up to him and saluted. "Good morning, Colonel. Colour Sergeant Bates reporting."

The man returned the salute. He laughed. "Be at ease, Jack. Now, give me your hand. It's excellent to see you."

"Mrs. Patricia Goodman, may I present to you Colonel Henry 'Harry' Sanderson, formerly commander of the West Kent Light Infantry. Colonel, this is Nurse Goodman, who is providing care for Major Pleydell."

"Ah, yes! I had heard about that. Well, welcome, Mrs. Goodman. Now, Jack, what can I get for you?"

"We require five"—pause—"no, make that seven, of your dinners."

"That's quite a bit to eat here."

"Of course, sir. We'll take them back to Hawkinge."

"Very well. Pies? We have mutton or minced beef."

"Oh, no, sir! We want your Kent fried chicken."

"Excellent. Seven dinners, with mash and peas porridge. They'll be in your hands directly."

Through a doorway behind the counter I could see a cook coating pieces of chicken with a kind of batter and plunging them into hot oil. The colonel busied himself dishing food from various pans and pots. I could see him placing the foodstuffs in small containers.

“Here you are, Jack. Each dinner is individually wrapped and I’ve put them together into this bundle. That will be fourteen shillings.”

I could not help but ask, “Tell me, Colonel. Where did you learn to make chicken by battering the pieces and frying them immersed in oil?”

“In Hong Kong, young lady, where the regiment served. The Chinese are very fond of food fried in this manner. I like it, too, and so do the people in Folkestone, but I doubt if the method will ever become popular.”

We made our farewells and set out again in the buckboard. “Well, Patricia, we have no more errands. It’s straight to Hawkinge now.” With that, we let Old Gray follow the road.

In Hawkinge, Jack, to my surprise, turned into Oak Lane. We stopped at Betty’s Bourne’s house. Jack tore open our large parcel of chicken.

“Here, Miz Patricia, please deliver these three dinners to Betty. They’re for her and young Frank, and I’ve even included one for that rascal Uriah Grimstead.”

I obliged Jack. I dismounted with the dinners, climbed the porch and knocked on the door. Of course, I immediately let myself in and shouted, “Betty! Betty!” Scarcely a minute had passed and I was on the porch again. I carried a wicker basket.

“And what have ye there?”

“Four bottles of Dr. Lister’s favorite Scotch whiskies. Betty thought they might be useful during the doctor’s visit.”

“Aye, if he doesn’t get too drunk to operate!”

“And further, she now knows all about Mr. Grimstead’s chicanery.”

“Excellent. Then it’s off to the manor we go.” When we arrived, I noticed that it was not yet eleven. We had had a busy morning, yet there was a good deal of time before dinner. I went to my room to change clothes. I put on my country cotton dress and apron as well.

Now it was time to return to the barn, where Jack had unloaded the carbolic acid. I found, to my great satisfaction, that he had set up a trestle table, with pails to fill and a supply of water. I set myself to work

In just a few moments, I had measured phenol into buckets and added water. I made three gallon buckets of it, reserving some of the substance for the operation.

Jack produced two groundsmen and the stable boy. “All right, me lads, take ye each a bucket and some rags, and head for the operating room.” And they did just that. Jack and I followed. It took us no more than fifteen minutes to wash down the walls, floor, operating table, side tables and trolley. We were finished well before dinner time.

By one o’clock, Jack and I were seated and ready for our dinner of Kent fried chicken. “Here you go, Miz Patricia. All warmed up and ready to eat.”

I looked at the pieces in front of me: a wing, a leg, and piece of “white meat,” a term we use because our good Queen Victoria generally frowns upon the word “breast.”

“Meg, these are quite brown. The pieces look like fritters.”

“Aye, that they do. Cooked fast in lots of lard, too, which adds to the flavor.”

“Are there no forks?”

“No, my dear, not unless you insist. You pick up the pieces with your hands, and eat like a barbarian.”

“Well, I suppose we do that with bread and butter, or with a sandwich, and with Sir Reg, I even ate ribs thus. So why not with chicken?”

I took a bite. “Yes, it’s really very good. Oh but the grease on my hands. There’s so much. I need to wipe it off.”

“I’ll get you a cloth, but in the meantime, just lick it off your fingers.”

“I can’t believe all this batter and frying in lard is quite healthy.”

“Probably not, but I must say, the colonel learned the technique in China, and you rarely see a fat Chinese person.”

Our dinner had no greater depth of conversation than that. At the end of the meal, Jack went to work outside and I sat with Meg to again review all our preparations. Happily, all was in place, even the linens, boiling kettles, and waste bowls.

After dinner, I determined to visit with Sir Reg. First, I went to my bedroom to change out of my country dress and put on something prettier. Then, on my way to the library, I stopped at our operating room. All was dazzling white, and, of course, the room smelled mightily of disinfectant. The furniture was placed, and the linens and bowls awaited use. At this point, I expended a very great sigh of relief.

At the library, I knocked. “Enter.”

“Good afternoon, Reginald. How do you do?”

“Well, thank you. There’s nothing like a meal from Colonel Sanderson to produce good feelings. Except, perhaps, the love of a woman.”

“This must be your lucky day, because you have both. Now, let me feel your pulse.”

I did. Once again, I fantasized that Sir Reg’s heart rate increased a bit when I took his hand.

“I am here mainly to let you know that all is in readiness for the operation. The room, the tables, the linens, and so forth.

“Well, what am I to say? That’s good, I suppose. And I thank you, as I know you have been hard at work for several days making the preparations. Now, I have more to say. If you will, please come to dinner tomorrow. Again we will have you, Meg, and Jack. Also, you may invite Betty Bourne and her son Frank. Perhaps Simon Shepherd, as well.”

“Why, Sir Reginald Pleydell! You are organizing an entertainment. I must say, that’s very earl-like of you.”

"I can't account for it, Patricia, but I actually look forward to a social event. That's why I had Meg order the finest joint of beef for the dinner."

Our conversation being at an end, I approached Sir Reg to kiss him. We managed an embrace, although a bit clumsily, given his wheelchair. As we separated, I was intensely conscious of his hands, as they slipped from behind my back. They seemed to pass my breasts quite slowly, and I fancy that he squeezed them together a bit.

"Oh, I must leave. I fear that I'm out of breath."

"Come back for more when you can, my dear nurse. We must practice kissing."

I left, and not too soon, or I would have been greatly tempted to linger.

Being free for the afternoon, I set off for Betty's house. I walked with a bounce in my step, a sign to me that I felt things were going well—as well as could be expected.

At Betty's house, I knocked and opened the door. "Betty, are you in?"

A shout from the rear: "Yes, of course. Come to the kitchen." I entered and sat down at the kitchen table.

"Well, Patricia, I must thank you—or perhaps, more correctly, Meg—for the chicken dinners. You saved me the trouble of preparing a meal. Even that low fellow Grimstead got a portion."

"He is a blackguard, isn't he?"

"Yes, and in addition to your words from earlier, I heard from Sam Fowler about a fancy carriage that went to the manor. Grimstead's peculiar behaviors are explained in the light of the visit by Sir Reg's sister."

"Oh, I must thank *you* again for the Scotch whiskey. Dr. Lister will be better off because of your generosity. And, speaking of Dr. Lister, are his rooms prepared?"

"Of course. All is in readiness. That's what a good landlady does. Now, would you like a drink?"

"Yes, of course."

"Here are mugs for ale, always close by. Now in a moment I'll be back with whiskey and glasses."

When she returned, we talked of many things. To quote from the recent book of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, writing as Lewis Carroll, we talked of "shoes, and ships, and sealing-wax, of cabbages and kings, and why the sea is boiling hot, and whether pigs have wings." I would not characterize the balance of our conversation as "catty talk," but we dwelt upon Eunice Pleydell, Uriah Grimstead, and other villains. I also went into great detail about my adventure in Folkestone.

"Can you believe that Andrew Wilson's son is the piano player at The Black Horse?"

"Yes, I knew that. I would have told you, but it didn't seem important at the time."

"And can you believe that Mrs. Zamboni is the Contessa da Gamba, and that she loves to cook?"

"Her cooking isn't a surprise, but her title is. A countess married to an iceman. Love is a marvel, isn't it?"

“Now, if you are up for it, I’ll give you a story.”

“Try me.”

“It starts on Friday night with a trip to the barn.” And from there, I filled Betty in on every lascivious detail of my adventure of the previous night. We laughed and laughed. Then I went to a new subject.

“This brings me to something I’ve been dying to share with you. Sir Reg and I...”

“Have figured out that you love each other?”

“Why, yes! How did you know?”

“To me it was evident some time ago. But what is evident to me doesn’t matter until the two participants determine it. Congratulations!

“Well, you shall learn more as this develops. There remain two more things for me to bring up to you. First, Sir Reg asks if you and Frank are free to come to Sunday dinner.”

“Of course. Frank will enjoy it, too, what with the prospect of again being in the company of two soldiers. As for Mister Grimstead, I’ll serve him a perfectly decent dinner—one that he can eat alone.

“And the last thing: would you care to attend church tomorrow?”

“Are you drawn to God?”

“With Sir Reg’s surgery soon to come, I imagine so.”

“Very well. In my case, after being with the Bowles brothers, I must purify myself. Perhaps I’ll gargle with holy water.”

“Then, I’ll be by in the trap and we can ride in style.”

I walked back to the manor, saying hello to various people on the Canterbury Road. I even popped my head in at both The White Horse and The Black Horse to give a greeting to the Bowles brothers. The last leg of my walk took me to the meadows near the bluffs, where I invited Simon to dinner.

At tea time, I joined Sir Reg in the library. “Sir Reg, may I join you for tea?”

“Of course. When I tell a woman I love her, that usually means she’s welcome at tea.”

I brought the serving cart to the library table. We sat side by side and I served us both.

“What do we have?”

“A hearty potato soup, and three kinds of sandwiches: ham, cheese, and Scottish smoked salmon. And there are Napoleons, made by Julia.” With that we began to eat. The conversation was quite light. Given that there would be a surgery in three days, I did not want to explore health issues. After the meal, we spoke of books and played several games of backgammon.

"I'll leave you now, Sir Reg."

"Patricia, you might consider calling me 'Reg.'"

"Oh, yes, Reg. But I do believe I should be more formal in front of others."

"Fine, and I should be, too. Now, please come here, Pat, and give me a kiss."

I went to Sir Reg and gave him my best, longest, most passionate kiss, much as I had done on Wednesday and Friday. As we drew apart, there was no doubt about Sir Reg's using his hands. As he withdrew them from my back, they did not just pass my breasts. Rather, he grasped them, squeezed them together gently, and let his thumbs and fingers linger over my nipples.

"Sir Reg, if you continue, I may not be able to walk to my room."

"I could send for your racing wheelchair and you could drive it there."

"No, I'm breathing too hard to operate it. I'll go. I'll come to your room to check on you before I go to bed."

As I walked to my bedroom, I was fairly glowing. If this was courtship, it certain had a stimulating tone. It also struck me—a bit sadly—that Sir Reg was in no position to take advantage of my vulnerability.

I changed from my dress into my kimono, and attempted to read. I started with Verne but abandoned it and spent some time with *Highland Rogue*, that dreadful book of Betty's. It was horrible, but actually I found some scenes to be a bit arousing.

It was time to check Sir Reg. I went down the hall to his bedroom and knocked gently.

"Come in." I found Sir Reg sitting up in his bed.

"Oh, I thought you might be asleep."

"No, not yet. I'm consumed with thoughts."

"About what, if I may ask?"

"About you."

"You flatter me, Reg."

"Not at all. I was reflecting that aside from your embraces over the last four days, no one has held me in the space of ten years. When you do so, it is surprisingly soothing."

"Well, I was married, and am rather comfortable with the idea. My Michael and I spent a good deal of time hugging. Oh! You *were* hugged once before that."

"I was not... Oh! If you mean when you and Meg pinioned me while I spasmed quite out of control, that doesn't count."

"Well, what about the houris of the Levant?"

“They aren’t paid to hug.”

“Then, my patient, if you find my therapy to be ‘surprisingly soothing,’ perhaps you’d care for some more of it?”

“Eagerly.”

I went to the bed and sat on the edge. Without his wheelchair, Sir Reg was quite easy to embrace. We spent a long time holding each other. After each hug, we would pull back and stare intensely at each other. This was much as it had been with my Michael, except that with him we lay side by side in our bed.

We spent time stroking each other’s face, and, if you will, “nuzzling.” There were light kisses on the cheeks and playful bites on the ears.

“Patricia, I feel so much better.”

“I feel that way myself. You see, that’s what wives do.”

“You may have noticed that I haven’t proposed marriage to you.”

“Actually, I had not. But tell me, why haven’t you, since you must have some inclination to do so?”

“I cannot bear the thought of anyone, especially you, being married to me. There can be no lovemaking. There could be no children. I am, despite your protestations, crippled.”

I laughed.

“Do you mock me?”

I hugged him again. “Oh, no! Not at all, Reg. It’s clear to me that, despite your experience of the world and your extensive library, you do not know some basic things about women.”

“What do you mean?”

“I love you. I believe that has sunk in.” Sir Reg nodded. “Love prizes companionship. Love prizes hugs and kisses. I could also speak of a fine mind and a lovely caring attitude. Further, you don’t need to use all your body to make the most of some of it. Above all, a wife knows and accepts many things in a husband, and she expects the same.”

“What about children?”

“What about your surgery restoring your full sexual function?”

“Well, if I don’t die, I suppose anything is possible.”

“That is all we can expect.”

“Then I’ll tell you this: If I don’t die, I will propose.”

I laughed. “Very sensible, because if you do die, you won’t make much of a husband. Now kiss me.” As he kissed my lips, I loosened the tie holding my kimono. My breasts couldn’t help but swing forward through the opening.

“Good. Now kiss *these*.” I lifted them up to his mouth.

He kissed them, and much more. He licked them. He sucked my nipples. He played, pulling my bits toward him and pushing them away, lifting them up and letting them fall, squeezing them together and letting them separate. I have absolutely no clue why breasts drive men mad, but I am witness to the occasion.

“Now bite the nipples, dear, but not too hard. They are called nipples because you must nip at them. And if you take them between your thumb and fingers, try not to squeeze too hard or twist them off.”

Sir Reg eagerly complied. I did my part, which consisted only of holding him, breathing hard, and moaning.

“Now, my good earl, we shall try an experiment. A science project, if you will. Tell me if you feel anything.”

I pulled back his coverlet, exposing his front. In a second, my kimono was off and on the floor. I climbed on the bed, parted his legs and knelt there. Now his Hampton wick—as the Cockneys call it—was directly in front of me. I put my tongue on Sir Reg’s navel and let it trace a short path south. I got to his penis and popped it in my mouth.

Of course it wasn’t erect, so it wasn’t the “turgid tusk” that men talk about. Just the same, my goal was to give it a workout. While it got no bigger, I would swear on a stack of Kama Sutas that if Sir Reginald ever regained control of the function, it would be formidable.

“Patricia, that’s nice. I appreciate the gesture, but I fear you are working to no avail.”

“Well, maybe I just like the taste of Sir Reginald Pleydell’s cock. Besides, it is twice blessed, as Portia says in *The Merchant of Venice*. It blesseth he who gets sucked and she who does the sucking.”

“Thank you! But now come up here and lie beside me on the bed.”

I went to Sir Reg’s side and stretched out at full length.

“Now, experience this. Tell me if *you* feel anything.” With that, he turned me to face away from him. He spent considerable time feeling my buttocks, parting and squeezing them. What a sensation! No one had done this since Michael. One of his hands ventured into the crack between them and sought out my most intimate part, while the other reached around me to cup one of my breasts.

Whatever he was doing, it was working. I began to breathe much more rapidly. Then—and I should not have been surprised—his lower hand reached around and his four fingers pressed my pudendum.

I moaned deeply.

“Good. Now, stand by.”

He began an easy back-and-forth rubbing, focused on the knob between my lips. The man may have been away from lovemaking for ten years, but he certainly knew what he was doing. After a short while, he rolled me on my back and gently spread my legs. The rubbing of my clitoris continued, but now something new was added. I felt a finger penetrating me.

Shades of Friday night with Master Jack! I had to arch my hips to meet Sir Reg's thrusts. As he moved faster, so did I, and I made no pretense of hiding my moans.

It may sound a bit cliché, but I actually recall saying, "Oh! Yes! God! Yes! Good! Oh! I mustn't be so noisy."

"Who would hear you besides Meg and Jack? And I'm confident that they are busy anyway."

"God! Don't stop! Faster! God! Yesssss!!!!"

I swear, if Sir Reg's hand hadn't restrained me, my hips would have hit the ceiling. My arched hips finally fell, and I relaxed for a few moments. Eventually was able to breathe normally. I turned to face him. We hugged, and I appreciated the hugging as much, or more, than he. We kissed, and I soon drifted off.

I slept very well. And, for the first time in years, I did not sleep alone. In the early hours of the morning, I left him. I returned to my room and lay down for a while on my own bed.

Sunday, July 9, 1865

Before sunrise, I walked quietly down the hall and peeked into Sir Reg's room. He was sleeping soundly, and I fancied I saw a smile on his face.

I watched the sun come up. To do so, I left my bedroom through my French doors, and walked north a bit to the ha-ha that separated the north lawn from the meadow.

I walked in my kimono and bare feet. I found it stunningly good to be dressed so minimally in a country setting. In fact, I felt a bit like a little girl again. I experienced the most marvelous combination of fatigue, as I was worn out, and great energy, as I hadn't felt so good in years. Everything glowed.

I was confident, too, that Sir Reg was better off for all our hugging and kissing. Did he know that I was in the same predicament—going too long without such touching—and that I was better off, too?

I returned to my room to wash. I determined that for church I would again wear my cotton dress with the tiny print pattern, minimum lace trim, and unobtrusive buttons. I then fixed my hair, and laid out my straw boater. It now struck me as a good time to write a few thoughts in my personal journal. My words were hot, and oh, how the pages must have burned!

I walked to Meg's kitchen at a brisk pace. Of course, she was there. "Good morning, Meg! How are you?"

"I'm better-most this morning, Miz Pat. How are you?"

"I slept very soundly."

"Then sit down. I'll pour you some tea. Would you like a full English breakfast today? It's a fry-up. Eggs, bacon, fried tomatoes, fried mushrooms, fried bread with butter, and baked beans. Jack loves it."

"No, dear Meg. I'm dressed for church and plan to be off to Betty Bourne's quite soon. I should like some bread and butter, if you will serve it."

"Of course. Soon I'll be starting work on a fine Sunday dinner."

“I’ll be back in time to offer help, if you want it.”

“I’ll want you to make the dining room perfect. That will take setting out the best china plates and silver flatware. Also, you’ll need to cut flowers from the garden.

“Right, Head Chef. I understand.”

“You won’t believe what Jack and I did last night.”

“Oh! I suspect I would, but tell me.”

“We went for a lusty walk in the closest woods. That’s where the huggin’ started. But then we went to our bedroom for a repeat of Friday night in miniature.”

“Wonderful!”

“Did you hear me scream?”

“No. Did you hear *me* scream?”

“No. Were you in pain?”

“Oh, no. You wrongtake that, to use a Kentish expression. I mean the *other* kind of screaming. I spent the night in Sir Reg’s bed.

Meg paused, gave me a long look, and laughed! “Well I am fanteeg—flustered, to use a Kentish expression. I don’t know what to say. Except that I like the idea very much!”

“I think it’s love.”

“Well, dearie, love must be expressed. But Sir Reg couldn’t...”

“No, but we did everything else.”

“Very resourceful. I’ll keep this to myself, of course. Will there be a marriage?”

“Not yet, and perhaps not at all. Sir Reg believes his so-called disability would be a barrier. I disagree, but at this point he doesn’t believe me.”

“Well, in me own humble opinion, you’d make that man a fine wife. And I’d be relieved of the task of cajolin’ him to eat his vegetables.” We hugged and gave each other a peck on the cheek. I left for the barn, where I hitched Old Gray to the trap. Then I was off to Betty’s and church.

I pulled up at Betty’s house and went in to fetch her. After a cup of tea, we departed for church.

Let me summarize the experience briefly: The service was good. Reverend Pritchett gave an unremarkable sermon, which was fine with me. My job, if you will, was professional: to say prayers for a successful surgery. Of course, I had prayed at the manor, as well, but it is common knowledge among the masses that God lives in a church on Sunday mornings.

After the service, Betty spoke briefly to the vicar, as it was rather an obligation for her. I merely smiled and nodded. After that, we were off. “Patricia, do you want to come into the house for a drink? I have little work to do today, since Frank and I will be your guests for dinner.”

“Certainly.”

Today, we went to the parlor. Betty came in with a cart containing ale, whiskey, mugs, and glasses.

“Betty, what’s wrong with men? Sir Reg believes that as long as he cannot walk—and make the beast with two backs, as they call it—that he cannot marry. He believes that doing so would deny me several things, including children.”

“Oh, my dear Patricia, although we have both been married only once, I think we can tease out an answer. To put it simply, many men believe in the slogan, ‘Be all that you can be.’ If they think they are being less, it disturbs them without limit.”

“Well, I find it ironic that Sir Reg has spent ten years *not* being all that he can be. You know that his attitude about life has been terrible. I have produced a change, if I may say so.”

“I understand. There’s pride and vanity. My Angus, world traveler that he was, refused to take the trains to Scotland. He insisted on a sea voyage, and that did him in. Yet, I must say that a man’s pride and vanity often translates to courage, and women like that.”

Betty and I parted with a hug, and I drove the trap back to the manor.

“Hello, Meg. How is dinner progressing?”

“All is well, Miz Patricia. How was church?”

“Reverend Pritchett was at his best.”

“Oh. Not very good, as usual?”

“Duller than dishwater. Now I’ll change dresses and help with the dining room and flowers.”

I changed into my best dress. Sir Reg might consider this dinner to be a small social occasion, but I took it to be a celebration. I suspected that for Reg, he viewed it as a variant of da Vinci’s “The Last Supper.” No matter. I picked a bright red satin brocade number, with a very full skirt and sleeves, with abundant lace trim.

In the kitchen, I took a basket and shears, and proceeded to cut flowers from the garden. I had asters, carnations, chrysanthemums, gladiolus, hydrangeas, and irises. Indeed, I had enough blooms to fill many a vase in the dining room. I determined to put the long items in tall vases and the short buds in shallow dishes.

In the dining room, I saw that Meg had laid out the manor’s best china, silver, and linen. I set the table, trying very hard to remember what my mother had told me about place settings.

As I was working in the dining room—and I hardly considered this to be work—Sir Reg entered. He was dressed in a fine suit of white linen, suitable for the tropics. He wore a cravat with regimental stripes.

“Well, if it isn’t Patty O’Furniture, the scullery maid. You look just like my nurse, only she is a great deal prettier.”

In my best brogue, I said, "Sure and it *is* yer Patty, sir. Good afternoon, Yer Worship. I hope you're feelin' right as rain."

"Indeed, I am. I received special attention last night."

"Very good, sir. Your nurse must be very attentive to your needs."

"And I to hers, I believe. Tell me, is that a new dress? It looks a bit fancy for a servant."

"It were loaned me by the nurse, Yer Worship. She's a blessed angel, she is."

"I agree. Now quickly, you may steal a kiss from me before anyone sees."

I gave Sir Reg a quick peck on the cheek, but didn't pull away. I went on to give him a long, lingering kiss upon his lips.

"Why, I am shocked, young lady! I may faint. I need a drink, so please bring me the whiskey decanter. You may have a drink as well, if you wish. We must wash our sinful kiss from our lips."

In my regular or "London" voice, I said, "Then we'll have to wash a lot more than our lips, Reg." I poured the whiskeys and we lingered over them.

"Do you still love me, Patricia?"

"More than ever, Reginald."

"That will be very important to me as I face a risky surgery."

We were quiet for a few moments. I then glanced out of one of the large windows facing the manor's entry. "Betty Bourne and her son Frank are here."

"Good. Let's go greet them."

"Both of us?"

"Yes, of course. I am, in theory, the master of the house, and the host of the dinner."

With that, we left the dining room and strolled down the hall to the entry. "Stroll" is actually incorrect; Sir Reg raced ahead in his wheelchair, and I merely stepped up my pace. Again, those damned high-button shoes kept me from running.

At the entry, we found Meg and Jack. Jack had opened the door. We all went to the front porch as Betty and Frank approached. "Who do we have, Jack?"

Betty and Frank ascended the steps to the porch. "Sir, I see Mrs. Elizabeth Bourne, former farmer of the community, church leader, supporter of our village's two pubs, and currently the owner and proprietress of a grand hostelry in Hawkinge. She is with her son Frank, a future soldier if I ever saw one."

"Oh, Jack! Stop it! This is plain Betty."

“Welcome to you both, Betty and Frank. I am the Earl of Radnor, but you can call me Reginald.”

“And who is that next to you, Sir Reginald?”

“With due respect to the lovely Mrs. Bates and Mrs. Bourne, the most beautiful woman in the world.”

Meg said, “Yer a great talker, Sir Reg! Now please get your guests inside so the dinner can commence. Wait! Here comes Simon Shepherd, the sheep baron.” Indeed, Simon was rapidly approaching the manor.

“Right, Meg. I go. Hello, Simon! I’m pleased to see you. Follow us!” With that, Sir Reg turned and led the party into the foyer.

“Betty, Patricia, please go with Meg to the kitchen. The men, and that includes young Frank, will be conferring in the library.” He wheeled his way down the hall, with Jack, Simon, and Frank following. What could we women do? We went to the kitchen.

In the kitchen, Meg had all things in readiness, but she was quite gracious about allowing Betty and me to participate in supplying final touches. Betty made pats of butter and I chopped parsley.

“Today, ladies, we have two serving carts, one for the joint and another for the rest of the items. Betty, fill the tureen with soup from the stove and put it on the cart.

“What have you made, Meg?”

“Mock turtle soup, on account of that Lewis Carroll fellow publishing a new book last Tuesday, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. It’s got a character in it called the Mock Turtle.”

“Meg, how do you learn of these things?”

“From the Times of London, as most people do. Now, Miz Patricia, put the beets, tatties, salad greens, horseradish, bread, and butter on the cart. Oh, and this flagon of ale goes on it, too. I’ll put the joint on a platter, so that it might set for a few minutes.”

“What about the dessert?”

“I’ll save the dessert for later, as I’m keeping it cool. It’s special.”

“I wonder what the men are doing.”

“What else would they do but talk of soldiering and have a drink?”

“A drink, for even my Frank?”

I said, “If Frank is to have a ‘taste of sin,’ Betty, best to let it flow from the Earl of Radnor.”

Meg went to a cabinet and produced whiskey and glasses. “Well, we can have a drink as well, and talk about our own sins, of which I will proudly share a few.”

Indeed, Meg was correct about the men. I learned later from Sir Reg that at that very moment, Frank Bourne had been having a dialogue with him.

“Sir Reginald, my mother says that you will have a surgical procedure on Tuesday.”

“Yes, Frank, that’s so, if Dr. Lister believes it can be done. So best you be nice to him when he comes to stay at your house. I want him at his best.”

“He is to remove a piece of shrapnel?”

“Yes, *the* piece of shrapnel, as I call it, if he can find it, and I think finding it should be no problem. Taking it out may be a whole different story. You know, son, in war we hear a lot about heroes who come home unscathed and heroes who fall dead. We don’t hear about the wounded. Even the London papers have little to say about them.”

“Are you afraid, sir?”

After a long pause, Sir Reginald said, “Yes, Frank, I am.”

“I thought you had courage.”

Jack stated, “Of course he has courage. Courage isn’t for the bloody battlefield alone. In battle, you are afraid, and must fight. But in much of life, the same applies. The coward shrinks from fear, while the courageous man faces the fear.”

“I believe I understand.”

Sir Reg said, “If you do, Frank, that is excellent. If not, you will understand later. Now men, let’s drink.”

After the drink, Jack said, “Are we ready to eat?”

“Yes, Jack. Ring for the women and we’ll go to the dining room.”

When the bell summoned us, Meg, Betty, and I pushed the carts down the hall. The men were seated, but Jack, Simon, and Frank stood when we entered.

Sir Reg commanded, “Good! You are here. Now please sit.”

“Betty, Patricia, please do as he says. I must fetch the wine.” Meg returned in a minute. She wheeled in a large silver bucket filled with ice.

“Meg, what’s this?”

“Champagne, Sir Reg. Perrier-Jouët, 1860. It’s a gift from Luigi and Viola Zamboni. I’ve had it cooling in the icehouse, and I’m told that it’s very sparkly.” She filled the glasses.

“My thanks to them. Well, I remark that the upcoming surgery is one time when I cannot follow Zamboni’s advice. It’s Dr. Lister who needs to ‘watcha my assa.’”

“Sir Reg, Meg and I will watch it as well. We are to be your surgical nurses.”

“Oh, my! My bum on display for all the world!”

Jack said, “Since you’ve brought it up, Major, I might add that I’ve wiped it a few times for you over the years.”

“Sir Reginald, I’m the only one who hasn’t seen your arse.”

“FRANK!”

“That’s quite all right, Betty. Young man, if I were able, I’d rise from this wheelchair and moon you. But I don’t wish to insult you. Did you know that since at least 1743, soldiers have exposed their butts to shame an enemy?”

“Excuse me, Sir. I didn’t mean to be rude. And now—mother, did you hear?—I’ve learned something new.”

Sir Reg said, “And that from the mouth of the ‘lesser nobility.’ Now, let’s drink. I cannot stand, but I’ll propose a toast.” We raised our glasses.

“As you know, I will undergo a surgical operation on Tuesday. There is considerable risk. No, Nurse Goodman, don’t object, for you know it’s true. However, I have the finest surgeon in all of the United Kingdom, and an excellent, no, *two* excellent nurses, Patricia and Meg.

“I will tell you quite frankly, that, given the risk, I wanted you all to be here for this meal. Also, I will tell you that I have met the most wonderful woman possible. I owe many things to her. So yes, let’s drink to the success of the operation, but more, let’s drink to the woman I love, Mrs. Patricia Goodman!”

There issued great applause from Jack, Meg, Betty, Simon, and Frank, although they had to set their glasses down to do so. I could do nothing but blush. Then we drank.

“All right, Mrs. Bates, please serve the food. Jack, could you carve, as I cannot stand over the joint?”

Jack carved and Meg served. “Enjoy! This joint’ll feed fourteen people once or seven people twice. Betty and Simon, I’ll send ye home with some. Now, all, be sure to have the Yorkshire pudding, too.”

I was very pleased at Sir Reg’s excellent mood. As I recovered from my embarrassment, I beamed at him, and easily added to our lively conversations. Our topics ranged from the upcoming hop harvest to the price of oysters in London. Near the conclusion of the meal, Meg wheeled one of the carts away, and in a few minutes, returned with it laden again.

“Now, ladies and gentlemen, we have dessert. Note well the cherries and plums, for do ye not know that Kent produces ninety percent of the cherries and fifty percent of the plums grown in England?” Meg passed the fruit for our dessert plates.

“Meg, *how* do you know these things?”

“Well, Sir Reg, it comes from living in the County of Kent, growing up a farmer’s daughter like Betty, and doing a lifetime of cooking. Oh, also I’ve been reading *The Economist* since it was founded in 1843.”

Sir Reg was brought up short. I think his ale was about to come out through his nose. “I had no idea you knew so much.”

“Well, sir, it ain’t by magic that your estates are prosperous. I have a hand in that, you know. And now for the *pièce de résistance*, as young Julia calls it. An Italian ice cream known as *gelato*. Viola da Gamba Zamboni made it special for me and Luigi delivered it this morning.” Meg then served the finest ice cream I had ever tasted.

“Enjoy it. It’s chocolate. And the little biscuits are in the shape of—let me think—the famous tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, in Florence, Italy.” We all applauded, for both Meg’s knowledge and Mrs. Zamboni’s gelato-making skills.

I must say, we were fairly stuffed, and quite happy about it. As we rose from the table, there were handshakes, hugs, and kisses all around. Betty and I offered to help Meg, but she refused. “No, dears, let’s all walk to the entry together. Tarry a moment while I make up some food for Simon and Betty.”

We said our goodbyes. In a few minutes, we waved as Simon walked to his hut and Betty and Frank walked back to the village.

“Now, Patricia, Sir Reg, I suggest you spend some time together, as I have a kitchen to clean. Plus, I want to be with my Jack. Oh, and don’t be expecting anything fancy at tea, as I’m fairly wore out from making this meal.” We nodded our assent, and started off toward the library. As we passed my day room, I said, “Sir Reginald, I have an idea.”

“Mrs. Goodman, I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised. What is it?”

“It’s a beautiful day, and no hired help is working. Now, I know you disdain to walk the manor grounds.”

He replied in his best Cockney, “Roit you are, guv’nor. Oy’ll wyger you a Lydy Godiva on it.”

“I understand, but let us go to my day room, open the French doors, and sit on the stone porch. We do as much for our shooting matches.”

Sir Reg gave it a thought. “Yes. I’d like that very much. And please stop smiling so broadly!”

When we arrived, there was no such thing as pushing Sir Reg’s wheel chair. He opened the door and went to his familiar position in front of the French doors. I opened them and he went outside. I brought a chair from my room and sat beside him.

We said nothing; we merely held hands—and we did so for a very long time.

“Patricia, I believe I should go lie down—alone, if you don’t mind.”

In my best Cockney: “Aw, guv’nor, don’t ya want some posh and becks? Ya, knaow, some sex? Don’t ya want to feel me Bristol cities?”

“Very much, but I look forward to sex and playing with your Bristols another time. I could use some rest.” I pretended to frown: “Very well, sir.” We had a good long kiss and Sir Reg wheeled himself out.

I changed into a very informal country dress and went to the kitchen.

“Meg, are you *still* working?”

“Well, I haven’t been working the whole time, dearie. I was cleanin’ up when Jack came in from our bedroom across the hall. He was as naked as one of them African Hottentots.”

“Oh, my!”

“And I’m so gullible. He said he thought he had some drippings from the joint on his roger and would I give it a look. He had no towel, he told me. I got on my knees and gave it a close look. I didn’t see anything, but he suggested I lick it off.”

“And?”

“Of course I did. After a minute, he told me he thought that the kitchen table was wobbly. I said I didn’t think so.”

“He told me that we must test it, and that I should lie on my back on it. Well, by now, I saw his game, so I told him that I would be too heavy unless I took all my clothing off.”

“And?”

“And so I did, but as I lay there for God and everyone to see, I told him that I *too* thought I had some drippings in me nether regions and that *he* should give it a look. As he did, I merely grabbed his ears, wrapped my legs around his shoulders and shouted, “Now *you* lick it off, Master Jack!””

“Oh, you are making me breathe hard. Was that the end of it?”

“Almost. He entered me and we had some regular lovemaking.”

“Now *that*, Mrs. Bates, is a fine story. Sir Reg and I merely sat on the north porch and held hands.”

“That’s good, too, dear. Anyway, as you can see, I went into my room and put on an older dress. I must finish cleaning up from the dinner, and I’ll need to make something simple for tea.

I left Meg, and walked the grounds of Folkestone Manor. In brief, I first passed the garden and barn and walked to the lake. I rather marveled at the day, with the rich yellow sun (yes, always yellow, but somehow brighter today) and the deep blue sky salted with fluffy clouds. I had had the most marvelous twenty-four hours.

From the lake, I turned somewhat west. I crossed a footbridge and entered the woods. I must say, English hardwoods make a most attractive forest.

After perhaps thirty minutes I returned to my room; walking directly to the stone porch and entering through my French doors. Perhaps I am still a silly young girl, but I opened my personal journal and poured my heart into it again. My! I reflected that if this diary were ever to be found, it would make a rather sizzling novel of romance.

Being time for tea, I joined Sir Reg in the library. I no longer needed to alert Meg, as she assumed that Sir Reg and I would take our meals together.

“Good afternoon, Reginald. How do you feel?”

“First rate. Last night was wonderful, and our embraces seem to have contributed to my being a somewhat genial host today.”

“You were an excellent host.”

“I meant what I said when I toasted you.”

“You mean, ‘Let’s drink to the woman I love, Mrs. Patricia Goodman?’”

“The very same toast. Now, here’s Meg with the cart. What do we have today?”

“Simply a beef broth, with bread and butter. Oh, and a dish of plums.”

“That is quite perfect. I stuffed myself at dinner.”

Sir Reg and I ate quietly. We talked only a little, about nothing more important than the food and the people at dinner.

“Patricia, Dr. Lister comes tomorrow.”

“I know, Reg. How do feel about it?”

“I believe I’m ready. More ready, because you are here.”

We embraced and kissed. I left for my bedroom and he left for his.

In my room, I had both the time and the motivation to write my mother.

1865, July 9th inst.

Mrs. Elizabeth Richardson
№ 41 Gloucester Road
Kew, Richmond

My Dearest *Maman*,

I have not heard from you, so I assume that you are adventuring with your MP. If so, excellent.

Enclosed please find a recipe written out by Meg Bates of the manor. It is for slow-roasted pork shoulder, which she calls “pulled pork.” There is, as well, a recipe for a unique sauce that those in the western United States use with it.

Meg sends this sentiment: “Remind her that anyone can easily prepare it, even that girl who cooks for her.”

Tomorrow, Dr. Joseph Lister arrives to perform an operation on Sir Reginald. It is a major procedure, so there is great risk. Yet, I feel it is the key to Sir Reg’s future.

Aside from my professional interest in Sir Reg’s health, he has told me he loves me, and I have responded in kind.

I am frightened, but I will follow all your wise words and steel myself.

Your loving daughter,

Miss Patricia Goodman
c/o Folkestone Manor

Hawkinge, Kent

With the conclusion of my letter, there was nothing left to do in what had been a very fine day. I took off my clothing and went promptly to bed.