

13. A Surgical Operation

Monday, July 10, 1865

There can be no doubt that the household at Folkestone Manor was filled with anticipation over the arrival of Dr. Joseph Lister. I conferred with Sir Reg, Jack, and Meg, and we agreed that it would be best if Jack alone met Dr. Lister at the station. Meg wanted to have food and drink in place, and I wanted to build Sir Reg's confidence. Besides, Jack needed to install Dr. Lister at Betty Bourne's boarding house.

From speaking with Jack and Betty, I have pieced together how the events of the morning proceeded.

Jack arrived at the Folkestone West railway station well in advance of the 10:07 AM train. He dressed for Dr. Lister much as he had for my arrival in June. He wore the uniform of a farmer, viz. brown pants, a white linen shirt, and a simple vest.

The cars issued forth the usual stream of summer pleasure seekers from London; and one man who looked quite different. He was of medium stature, perhaps not quite forty years of age, and sported side whiskers. He wore a conservative suit of clothing—black trousers, black waistcoat, and a chalk-striped jacket. He carried two suitcases.

"Are you he, then?"

The man started, and looked directly at Jack. "That's a verry odd question, my man. Of course I'm not heathen. I'm a Quaker, if you must know, and I dinnae see why ye must know."

"Oh, my apologies, sir. I should ask if you are he, Dr. Joseph Lister. If so, I shall drive you to Folkestone Manor."

"And who might ye be?"

"I'm Jack Bates, majordomo of the estate. Formerly, I was Colour Sergeant of the 3rd Regiment of Foot, also known as The Buffs."

"Ah, I see. I thought you had the carriage of a military man. Well, Mr. Bates, I am indeed Joseph Lister, 1st Baron Lister, Baronet. Also OM, FRS, PC.

"You should call me Jack, sir."

"And you should dispense with 'sir,' Jack, and any titles. In the operating theatre I am 'Joseph,' or more often simply 'Lister.' Where is Nurse Patricia Goodman?"

"With Sir Reginald. They await you at the manor. I'll take your bags. The wagon is there at the edge of the platform."

Jack loaded the bags and Dr. Lister climbed into the buckboard. Jack barely pulled on the reins and Old Gray headed for Hawkinge.

"How do you come to know Sir Reginald Pleydell?"

"He was Major Pleydell, my commander in the Crimea. It was I who rescued him at the Battle of Balaclava Haro Prii."

“That is where he caught the piece of shrapnel, correct?”

“Just so, sir, er, Lister.”

“Very well. As I recall, that was ten years ago. Hmmm. A long time. Well, we shall see what we shall see.”

Not more than twenty minutes later, Jack turned into Oak Lane and pulled up in front of Betty Bourne’s house.
“And what place is this, Jack? Not Folkestone Manor, I surmise.”

“The home of Mrs. Elizabeth Bourne and her son, Frank. We have arranged for rooms for you here.”

Jack began to unload the bags. Lister climbed down.

“Hand me the small one only, lad. The large bag is needed in my work.”

A woman appeared on the porch, and gave up a big smile.

“Hello, Jack. And you, sir: *Ceud mìle fàilte! Is mise* Mrs. Elizabeth Bourne.”

Dr. Lister was startled, and he smiled. He had been welcomed in Scottish Gaelic. All he could say was “*Tha mi toilichte do choinneachadh*, Mrs. Bourne.”

“Now, step on up here, Dr. Lister, and we’ll get you settled into your rooms.”

Dr. Lister and Jack ascended the porch steps. Betty took them upstairs to a suite just down the hall from my rooms.

“Will these rooms do, Dr. Lister?”

“Aye. They’re bonnie. Bright and sunny. Quite a contrast to my lodgings in London.”

“Shall we leave you to unpack your things?”

“No, that can wait. I want to see this Reginald Pleydell fellow.”

The group descended the stairs.

“Where are you from, Lass?”

“Born and raised around here. I’m a farm girl.”

“Then how is it that you speak...?”

“Gaelic? I learned a bit from my husband Angus, now deceased.”

“Hmmm. Angus Bourne. That’s a familiar name. I once had a student with that name.”

“Indeed. I’m not surprised. It’s a common enough name in Scotland.

“Tell me, where can I find a wee dram?”

“Either here in my parlor or at the manor.”

“Irish, I suppose.”

“Nonsense, Dr. Lister. Your telegram called for Glenkinchie or Glenlivet. You will find each of them here *and* at Folkestone Manor.”

He stopped and stared. “You are a rare lass.”

“Indeed, sir. My Angus always said so.”

“Betty, why not fetch a bottle and the glasses. Riding in the cars can be tiring, and I’m sure Dr. Lister needs to wash the cinders from his throat.”

Jack and Lister sat in the parlor. In a moment, Betty returned with whiskey and glasses.

“Mrs. Bourne, if you will, tell me a bit about your husband.”

“In 1847, Angus attended the University of Edinburgh to study medicine and engineering.”

Lister interrupted, “But he left in 1849 to go to California. He was a wee bairn of but nineteen years.”

“Yes. How did you know?”

“Angus Bourne was indeed my student. What happened to him?”

“He found a bit of gold and returned. I met him in 1852. We were married within days, and we bought a farm to raise hops.”

“Well, madam, your gain was medicine’s loss. He would have made a fine surgeon. He is dead, you say?”

“Yes, sailing from here to Edinburgh. The vessel sank in a storm on June 20, 1860.”

“Then you have had a great loss, as well. I was very fond of the boy.”

They all finished their drinks, and the men departed for Folkestone Manor.

I understand that Dr. Lister and Jack chatted briefly on the drive down Barnhurst Lane to the manor. As the wagon pulled up to the front entry, Meg and I were standing on the porch, she in her best frock and I in my uniform. The men dismounted.

“Welcome to Folkestone Manor, Dr. Lister. I am Margaret Bates, Jack’s wife, but you should call me Meg. This, of course, is Nurse Patricia Goodman.

“Aye, pleased to meet you, Meg. Ye are a bonnie lass. And you, nurse, will be bonnie as well when you remove that silly Florence Nightingale head covering.”

I blushed and took off my nurse’s “bonnet.” Indeed, I hadn’t worn it once since my arrival in June.

“Dr. Lister, come with me please. Perhaps we could talk for a few moments before you meet Sir Reginald.”

Lister nodded, and I led him to the parlor, immediately adjoining the foyer. “D’ye want to say anything in particular?”

“Principally that Sir Reg is well aware of your credentials and he is actually eager to proceed with the operation. Although it might be merely a show of bravado, I prefer to believe that, underneath, it is sincere.”

“That is all to the good. Is he aware of the risks?”

“Yes. I’ve made them quite clear to him.”

“Then I’ll remind you, as I will remind him: I am quite good at my work, but the man faces a very serious ordeal.”

“Yes, sir. I understand. Of course, he should hear that from you.”

“Now tell me, Nurse Goodman. What *are* ‘big battleships’?”

I blushed. “An English translation of a Chinese expression. As you are a doctor, I’ll demonstrate.”

With that I stood straight and breathed in deeply. I pulled my elbows back. My bosom could not help but jut forward.

“Ho! Ha! I see! So *that* is the information that Dr. Wong Kei passed on to his son.”

“Yes, Dr. Lister. I hope my bits don’t get in the way as I hand you surgical instruments.”

“Ha, it shall nae be a problem, my buxom nurse. Now, I hope yer brains are every bit as big as those Tommyknockers. That is what we need.”

“I have read, doctor, and I believe I’m prepared.”

“What of that woman, er, Meg Bates?”

“She is up for any and all things. Her primary acquaintance with surgery is killing chickens.”

“That will be fine. Trust me, Mrs. Goodman, I have had medical students fainted at the sight of my first cut.”

“Oh! Well, Dr. Lister, you can be assured that both Meg and I are up to the task.”

“Very well, then. Now, let us meet our patient.”

I took Dr. Lister to the library to meet Sir Reg. I knocked and opened the doors.

Sir Reg sat in his wheelchair, fully dressed. I noted that he was wearing one of his best suits, and he struck me as looking exceedingly fit—and handsome, too.

“Doctor Lister, I presume.”

“Sir Reginald Pleydell, I believe.”

"Gentlemen, do you wish me to stay?"

"No. I will give Sir Reginald some specifics from which you would derive no benefit. But after our interview, I want to examine the site of the injury, and would value your opinions. Where might that be done?"

"In Sir Reg's bedroom. When you are done, simply ring the bell for Meg. She'll show you to the room."

I went to the kitchen for a cup of tea. In about thirty minutes, Meg heard the call of the bell, but when she went to the library, she found no one. The two men must already have gone to Sir Reg's bedroom. So I walked there straightaway. There on the bed lay Sir Reg, naked and on his stomach.

"Tell me, Sir Reg, do we have modesty issues here?"

"Not at all, doctor. She's seen it all before."

"I'll now locate the shrapnel, if I can. In theory, I will palpate it. In theory, I will attempt by feel to determine its size, shape, and location. However, in fact, based on what Nurse Goodman has written me, I will not come close to touching it."

I pointed to the base of Sir Reg's spine. "Doctor Lister, look carefully at this spot."

"Yes, I see it. I will feel the muscles and bones at its periphery." Lister carefully pressed the tissues surrounding a small bump with his fingers. "Ah, yes! There is an obvious anomaly here."

"I'm glad you see it. That wasn't possible until Nurse Goodman helped me get rid of some body fat."

"Sir Reginald, here is what we face. Imagine, if you will, a hatchet head embedded in a green oak log. It is wedged tightly and difficult to remove. Imagine further that the log is hollow and that the hatchet head is rather more inside the log than outside of it."

"I understand."

"Beside that small problem, all is well. I have poked and prodded your limbs and your organs in general, from the outside, of course. I pronounce you fit for the operation."

"I find it odd, but I'm rather happy to hear that. Yet I can't altogether say I'm overly enthusiastic."

"I quite understand. But enthusiastic or not, I'm sure you'll be there. Now goodbye, Sir Reginald. I'll see you at precisely 7:00 AM tomorrow."

Dr. Lister and I left room. "Let us return to the library to plan. Please ring for Meg Bates to join us."

On our way to the library, we stopped at the makeshift surgical theatre. Dr. Lister took some moments to inspect everything. In the library, I rang for Meg and she joined us.

"Ladies, please seat yourselves. First, have all the preparations specified in my letter been made?"

"Yes, Dr. Lister." I handed him a list.

“Ah, yes. Room set aside, whitewashed, and disinfected. Table and trolley in place. Allowance for boiling, draping linens, waste rags, and white coats. Now, there is more.”

“What should we do?”

“Pad the operating table, and the trolley, also. Make Sir Reginald’s bed comfortable with fresh clean sheets, once he is out of it, of course. And, nurse, I should like you to make two gallons of phenol, in a strength far weaker than the mixture you used for disinfecting the room. Now, where might I put my instruments and the anesthesia?”

“In my day room. You may change there as well.”

“Good. As to food, Sir Reginald should eat nothing for six hours before the operation, and no liquids within two hours of it.”

“Well, then, it sounds though he may eat dinner and high tea today.”

“That’s so, but I suggest you keep foods light. Also, he may have his usual pain medications, but no alcohol.”

Meg and I nodded our understanding.

“As to timing, I shall arrive before seven o’clock, and we will begin the operation on the hour. Meg, please have boiling water ready when I arrive. I don’t mean for tea, although I would welcome that, too. Please keep additional water boiling, against the case that someone drops an instrument on the floor. By the way, Nurse Goodman, we will use ether, as it’s less likely to kill the patient than chloroform.”

“Doctor, will you stay for dinner?”

“I think not, Meg. I believe I’ll return to the village and eat at Mrs. Bourne’s. She assures me that she will not serve haggis. In fact, I intend to walk there. I have sat far too long today. However, I *will* join you in a drink of Scotch whiskey.”

I crossed the library to the bottle and glasses.

“Here we are, Dr. Lister. Glenlivet.”

Dr. Lister raised his glass. “Here’s to our success. Well, whit’s fur ye’ll no go by ye!”

We drank up, and Dr. Lister stood up. We said our goodbyes at the door and he began his walk to the village.

At one o’clock, I found Sir Reg, as usual, in the library.

“Good afternoon, Sir Reg. Or should I call you ‘Sir Darling’?”

“Good afternoon, Nurse Goodman. Or should I call you ‘Nurse of My Dreams’?”

Meg came in to inquire about dinner. Sir Reg said, “Meg, please join us for dinner. If Jack is nearby, he’s welcome, too.”

In a very short while, Meg arrived with her serving cart, and with Jack as well.

“Seat yourself, friends, and I believe I can call you friends. Meg, what do we have today?”

“Peasant food, Sir Reg.”

“Potatoes and onions?”

“No, Italian peasant food, made with the ingredients Viola Zamboni gave Jack in Folkestone Saturday last. The noodles are called *linguini*, and the sauce is *marinara* sauce. To them I have added small balls of minced beef. The bread is the same as usual, except that on Viola’s advice I have slathered it with butter and garlic and toasted it briefly.”

“Excellent. Let’s drink. Will you pour the ale?”

“No, sir. Doctor’s orders. Today we have a drink made of lemons, water, and sugar.”

“Very well. Raise your glasses, then: To a successful operation!”

“Hear, hear!” We drank and then began to eat.

Reg took a bite. “The condemned man ate a hearty meal.”

Silence. We stared.

“That’s a joke, my friends. There’s no problem, really.”

I took this to be a good explanation, and returned to eating.

My afternoon consisted of no activity whatsoever. I asked Sir Reg if he needed anything, and he answered in the negative. This was good. Also, we had all done as much in the way of preparation as we could do.

At tea, I pushed the serving cart to the library and entered. “Here, Reg. Here’s tea. It’s a simple meal, crafted by Meg, for the surgical patient.”

“Ah, I can see by the tureen that we have soup. What kind?”

“Chicken soup, with some tiny dumplings filled with meat.”

“I’ve never had it before.”

“Actually, darling, you ate this on June 29. Remember? Meg learned to make it from Mrs. Kreplach in the village.”

“Tell me, my love, will you remember everything all the time for the rest of your life—and mine?”

“Yes, that seems likely. I remember everything where the health of my patient is concerned. If I love him, as I do you, I remember everything else, as well.”

We ate. The soup was hot and tasty, and we dipped our bread into it, too.

“Oh, Woman of the Extraordinary Memory, what is the biggest word you know?”

I paused. “That would be ‘esophagogastroduodenoscopy,’ which you might abbreviate EGD.”

“And what, for heaven’s sake, is that?”

“It’s where the doctor puts a tube with a light down your throat to see what disease might be there. What’s the biggest word *you* know?”

“Easy. ‘Patricia Goodman’s breasts.’”

“That’s not a word. That’s a phrase.”

“Very well, I don’t have a long word, but I’ll give you a long name: “El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles del Río de Porciúncula.”

“What is that?”

“The name of a city in the southern part of California, in the western United States of America. It means ‘The Town of Our Lady the Queen of Angels of the Porciúncula River.’ It is shown in the atlas as ‘Los Angeles.’”

We finished the meal and spent a quiet hour together—reading, chatting, holding hands, and exchanging kisses. As the evening drew on, I left and went to my bedroom.

I wrote in both my professional and personal journals. The day had been a good one. Now, like Sir Reg, I needed to rest for the surgery in the morning.

Tuesday, July 11, 1865

Operation day! I awoke at precisely 5:00 AM, without the need for Meg to fetch me. I owed that to years of working in hospitals where I might work any number of different schedules.

After performing my toilette, I dressed in my nurse’s uniform and laid out white coats, head coverings, and masks for Meg and me to use later. It remained only for me to go to Meg’s kitchen.

“Good morning, Nurse Bates! How do you do?”

“Oh, Patricia, I’m nervous, to tell you the truth.”

“You know the names of the instruments, as I taught you?”

“Of course.”

“Then you have nothing to be concerned about. Ah, I see you have water on the boil.”

“I do. Let’s put them surgical instruments in the pot and let the water boil them awhile.

At half six, Dr. Lister came into the kitchen.

“Good morning, nurses. Meg, I let myself in through the front entry.”

“That’s all good, doctor. Now, the instruments are boiling. Would you care for a cup of tea?”

“Aye. Just a sip. I’ll nae want to be pissing my pants during the procedure.”

Lister drank some tea. “Very well. Now, I’ll put on a smock and meet you in the surgery.”

Jack went to wake Sir Reg and get him ready. Meg withdrew the instruments from the boiling water and placed them upon a tray; then I took them to the surgery. At 7:00 AM exactly, I was in the operating room with Dr. Lister. Instruments were at the ready. Meg and Jack wheeled in Sir Reg on the trolley.

“Good morning, all. Dr. Lister, I could have arrived under my own power, you know.”

“Aye, and left us with the problem of getting you out of here when we’re done. The trolley accomplishes that. Now, everyone, when I give the word, each grab a limb, and we’ll transfer Sir Reginald to the table.”

“One, two, three, heave!”

“All right, Patricia. Moisten that cloth with ether and put it over Sir Reg’s nose and mouth. Sir Reg, breathe deeply. You’ll soon be asleep.” I wet a cloth and brought it to Sir Reg’s face.

“I love you, Patricia.”

“I love you, Reginald.” I gave him a long kiss.

“Do you kiss all your patients?”

“Just this one, Dr. Lister.”

I now applied the cloth firmly. Sir Reg lost consciousness, and we were ready for the next step.

“Good. Meg and Patricia, let us roll him over, bare his back, and proceed.”

“Put on your masks. Scalpel, Patricia. Meg, mind his breathing. If there is any trouble, we must stop.”

Lister made a shallow vertical incision along Sir Reg’s spine. Meg, despite herself, let out a peep.

“Quiet, please. Hand me clamps, and be ready to sop up blood.”

Meg did so, and the cutting continued. At last the fifth vertebra and the *cauda equina* were exposed.

“Dr. Lister. There are so many nerves. It does indeed resemble a horse’s tail.”

“Irrigate, Patricia. There’s too much blood. Good. We are going through that bundle of nerves. I’ll carefully dig in to get to the shrapnel.” Dr. Lister proceeded carefully, for what I thought was an age. “Now we explore.”

It had taken over an hour to get to this point.

“Ah, I see! Two things”

“What, doctor?”

“First, I have a glimpse of the shrapnel. A ragged piece of iron embedded in the edge of the fifth lumbar vertebra. It’s sticking half out of the opening—the foramen.”

“What’s the second thing?”

“He has a herniated disc. That alone is a cause of Sir Reg’s severe pain. We’ll fix that first.”

“You can fix it?”

“Certainly. It’s a shame, but Reginald Pleydell should have addressed this—and the shrapnel—ten years ago.”

“Yes, but the physicians advised against it, and without your experiments, he probably would have died of infection.”

“You’re quite right, Patricia. Well, let us proceed. Please wipe my forehead, and mind his breathing, Meg. I don’t want him either waking up or sinking deeper.”

As Lister worked: “Now, witness a discectomy: I’m removing the herniated disc material that presses on the spinal cord. That pressing is what causes pain. We want to relieve any nerve compression.” Lister cut and removed tissue very slowly.

“There! Done! Now for the shrapnel. Meg, more clamps, please. Patricia, forceps, please. Meg, please irrigate and wipe the water away. Don’t worry, Meg; you won’t kill him.”

Lister studied the vertebra and the shrapnel closely. He applied the forceps and pulled. He gave the shrapnel a push to dislodge it and tried again. The repeated this action several times.

“No good. Surgical hammer, please.” Lister gently tapped the shrapnel with the hammer, and applied the forceps. He tried again, and then he tried a third time. The results were no better.

“Tha mo bhàta-foluimein loma-làn easgannan!”

“What’s that?”

“An old Gaelic expression, roughly meaning that my boat is filled with eels. I mean to say we have a problem and must improvise. Meg, please find Jack.”

“That won’t be hard, Lister. He’s just outside the door. Jack! Come in quickly!”

“Jack, my man, do ye have a shop?”

“Yes, Lister. This is a farm, you know.”

“Then quickly bring a two-pound dog-head hammer, pliers, and a punch. As speedily as you can.”

Jack was gone as fast as one of Sir William Congreve’s rockets.

“Meg, leave us. Go to your boiling water. When Jack comes, boil the tools at least five minutes, and bring them here immediately after.”

I said, "What about Sir Reg?"

"He'll keep, but still, we should move as fast as possible. Watch him carefully, Patricia."

It was no more than seven minutes later when Meg returned. She carried a tray with the new "instruments" on a linen cloth.

"Very well, Meg. Pliers, please. Hmmm. It dinnae work. I'll try again."

Lister tried three more times to tease the shrapnel out with the pliers. The results were no better.

"Well, the foreign object is stuck, tightly involved with the bone. Patricia, the *rongeur*—the bone nibbler—please."

"Will this help?"

"Yes, I'm going to remove a portion of the lamina. Remember what I said about a hatchet head stuck in a green log? This is a way to start getting it out."

Lister worked on the vertebral bone for a minute or two. "There! Now, Meg, the hammer and the punch."

Dr. Lister placed the punch at the edge of the shrapnel and tapped it with the hamper. He did this three times—a bit harder each time.

CRACK!

"Ah! It moves! Pliers, Meg."

Lister applied the pliers to the shrapnel and pulled hard. *My God, I thought, this will kill Sir Reg!*

"Ah! We have it! Forceps, and hold a small bowl for me."

Dr. Lister applied the forceps and held a ragged piece of iron up to the sunlight. With a stroke, he dropped it into the bowl. The copper bowl gave a resounding clunk.

"There! That will make a fine souvenir for your patient. Now, in a moment we'll button him up."

Jack said, "Why, you're like a blacksmith, doctor."

"Ho! For orthopedic surgeries, Jack, you are exactly right. Or sometimes like a sculptor, chipping away bone to make a bit of an opening in a vertebra."

For a moment, we all breathed a bit easier.

"Our next task is to make sure that Sir Reginald lives to enjoy this triumph. First, we irrigate. Good. Now, bring the phenol, as we must apply antiseptic."

Doctor Lister began removing clamps, one by one. He resettled the tissues, and at the last, stitched up the wound. He removed his mask.

I looked at my watch. Two more hours had passed.

“Meg, a cloth for my head, please. Very good. Patricia, please fill a syringe with morphine. You’ll find that laid out on the side table. Now, Jack, roll the trolley next to the table, as you did when we began.”

Jack did so.

“Jack and Meg, take his shoulders. Patricia, you and I will take his feet. We must transfer him to the trolley in one move, and we’ll do the same in his bedroom.”

We did all this. In the bedroom, Dr. Lister checked Sir Reg’s breathing.

“Patricia, he seems to be breathing normally. Wait for him to revive, and ring for me. I want to talk with him. I’m going to the kitchen for tea.”

I sat quietly by Sir Reg’s side, not taking my eyes from him for an instant. I was greatly relieved that he hadn’t expired upon the operating table; now, I wanted him to regain consciousness.

Before long, I saw his eyes flutter and pop open. He turned his head and uttered a deep and profound word.

“Hello.”

“Hello, darling.” I didn’t dare hug him or even attempt a kiss. I merely squeezed his hand.

“Is everything all right?”

“Better than all right.” I went to the bell rope. “I’ll ring for Dr. Lister.”

In less than a minute, Dr. Lister entered. He had removed his operating smock and appeared in his waistcoat.

“Good morning, Sir Reginald. We meet again. How do you feel?”

“Rather good.”

That will change, I’m afraid, but soon you will feel very good every day. Now, meet your friend of ten years.” Lister held up the piece of shrapnel, cleaned of blood. It was about the size of a common penny, but with jagged edges.

“Oh! So that’s what did me in.”

“Yes, Sir Reginald. It’s about the size of a bullet, but unlike a bullet, this little item decided to kill you slowly.”

“I thank you very much, Dr. Lister.”

“Good. I deserve it. Now, be aware first that you will experience post-surgical pain. Nurse Goodman will take care of that. Second, be assured that I will leave detailed instructions with her as to your care. She is far brighter than most medical students and should treat you well.”

Sir Reg gave me a glance and nodded.

“Very well, I’m off. I’ll check you in the morning. Good day.” Dr. Lister nodded to me. I had my syringe at the ready.

“Now show me a buttock, my dear, and I’ll give you pain medication.”

He rolled slightly to the left and I injected him.

Lister said, “In a moment you will be in the land of unicorns, rainbows, and nurses with big bits.” Sir Reg could not, of course, resist the effects of the morphine. He nodded off and was soon resting quietly.

Lister and I repaired straightaway to the kitchen.

“Pull out the Glenlivet, Meg. We all did a good job today.”

“Shall I serve it in the library, sir?”

“No! Your kitchen is fine.”

Dr. Lister sat himself at Meg’s kitchen table, as did Jack and I. Meg reappeared, poured, and sat down herself. “Doctor, I am exhausted.”

“As well you should be, Meg. You did well, as did you, Jack and Patricia. Now, lift your glasses. To Sir Reginald Pleydell. *Slàinte mhor!* Great health!” We drank.

Jack said, “And to Dr. Joseph Lister, the finest surgeon in the United Kingdom, which is to say, the world!” We drank again.

Meg asked Dr. Lister, “Would ye care to wash yer whiskey down with a mug of ale? The fact is that the hops were developed by your former student, Angus Bourne.”

“Aye, I would. As I used to tell Angus,

Scotch makes ye droonk without filling ye up.
Ale fills ye up without making ye droonk.”

We nodded. Meg brought the ale and Dr. Lister took a deep draught.

“This ale is very different from common English ales.”

“Indeed, Dr. Lister. Ask Betty Bourne about it. Angus developed a new and special breed of hops.”

Lister nodded. After a moment, he spoke simply. “Ye ken that we had some, er... surprises today?”

Jack said, “I should say so, Lister. I never dreamed I’d be having Meg sterilize me hammer and punch.”

“Jack, my bucko, medicine is filled with surprises. Why, I predict that someday these bone surgeries will be done with drills and saws that you’d generally see in a steam-powered sawmill or foundry. The surgeon will supervise while a mechanic guides the tools. For example, we will be able to replace a hip joint with a ball of the purest metal, and its prong will be inserted exactly into a well-drilled femur.

“That seems impossible, Doctor.”

“You wait, Patricia. The future holds much promise. Now, to business. I will give you all various instructions to follow. My instructions are:

Jack, you are to burn all the rags used today. They may be filled with microorganisms, which I call ‘germs.’

Meg, you must wash all the linens promptly, but they may be reused.

Further, Meg, to you and Nurse Goodman, I will suggest some proper meals for Sir Reginald as he recovers. Do not worry. Within two or three days, he can eat like a horse if he likes. Just the same, let us not tax his system overmuch at the beginning.

Please boil all the instruments against my returning in the morning. Pack them in my suitcase.

As to the management of pain, Patricia, you are fully aware of what should be done. I leave you my syringes and morphine, as both the needles and the opiate are likely superior to what you might obtain from even the best apothecary in London.

Finally, if any of ye are of a religious bent, offer up your prayers. Many a man who should have lived has died for no apparent reason. We might as well have the Almighty on our side.”

“Tell me, Dr. Lister, will you stay for dinner?”

“I think not, Meg. I want to rest. And it strikes me that you have been fully occupied and should not be tasked with preparing dinner. Besides, Betty Bourne has promised to make me Arbroath smokies, although how she can obtain smoked haddock in this village is quite beyond me. Further, I must advise her son Frank, the would-be soldier, about bullet wounds—what we call ‘terminal ballistics.’ That may dampen his enthusiasm.”

“Jack can drive you.”

“Good. I welcome it, as I am hardly up for a walk. Now, Jack, in the morning, please pick me up at exactly 8:00 AM. I’ll see Sir Reginald and then I ask you to drive me directly to the train station.”

“You are leaving so soon?”

“Indeed, Patricia. There’s nothing more I can do—and nothing that you *cannot* do.”

Meg asked, “Tell me, doctor. Will you not take a fee for your work?”

“No. I have a good salary at the University of Glasgow Medical School, the University of Edinburgh Medical School, and the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. Now, Meg, pour another round, to ‘remove the trail dust from the throat,’ as the cow herders in the American state of Texas say.”

Meg poured and we drank up. Then Dr. Lister and Jack took their leave of us.

“Oh, dear! What shall I make for dinner? There has been no time to cook.”

“Why Meg, surely there’s no need to lift a finger in the kitchen. Sir Reg won’t be needing anything. Let us just set out what food left over from a previous meal for you, Jack, and me. After dinner, I’m going to lie down, and I suggest you do the same.

Meg agreed, so together we assembled some broth, slices of cold beef, cheese, and fresh fruit. Of course there was bread with butter. I could eat Meg’s bread alone with great satisfaction.

Jack returned and we sat for dinner. There was little conversation, as we were all quite exhausted. Upon finishing, I checked Sir Reg—who was sleeping soundly—and went to my room for a well-deserved nap.

At five o’clock, I prepared a syringe of morphine. I took a tea cart with food from the kitchen and walked to Sir Reg’s bedroom. I knocked gently, and to my surprise, a voice bid me enter.

“Ah, you’re awake.”

“I must have died and gone to heaven. I see an angel.”

“No, you’re not dead, for which I am grateful. As for ‘angel,’ I thank you today, but wait until I’m older, my love. Old women don’t look angelic. How do you feel?”

“A bit like I did when I was wounded in 1854—as though the Russian army had marched over my back. I suspect that my operation was no easy process for Dr. Lister.”

“I’ll give you details later and you will be amazed that he succeeded. I will only say that his work rivaled that of Bill Black in the village. For now, you must heal, and of course we will avoid infection.”

“What do I do now? Lister said he would instruct you.”

“And so he has. He says that tomorrow you are not to rise unnecessarily. But I feel that if you want to, you may briefly leave the bed tomorrow—taking care not to tear your wound. I need not recommend against your walking, as that is not possible; however, you should not lift, bend, or twist for some time. Lastly, Dr. Lister will visit you in the morning. He will inspect his work and advise me further.”

“How will I fill the time?”

“Much as you have done. When you take less morphine, we can shoot our weapons. Until then, you will likely be an erratic marksman. Enjoy the conservatory, read in the library, and, if I may suggest it, visit Meg’s kitchen. She is great fun. You will not assent, of course, but I think you should let Jack push your wheelchair to the corral, shop, and barn.”

“And what will you do?”

“I shall keep you correctly medicated until the pain of the operation subsides. I will massage all of you except your lower back, where I will limit myself to changing your dressing. After that, I have several tasks planned for you.”

“Tasks! I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised.”

“Indeed. We must move on. I have seen soldiers who were unable to use an arm. After surgery, they were capable, but still did not use it. The result is that they never regained their ability. It must not be so with you.”

“Very well.”

“Also, I will cover you with kisses, but alas, I am advised against hugging you.”

“What do we have to eat?”

“A rather light meal, but that’s what’s called for. At tomorrow’s dinner, you may eat like a trencherman if you like. First, here is broth from yesterday’s joint. Shall I feed you?”

“No, simply pass me the bowl and spoon.”

“Would you like some small bits of meat and cheese?”

“Yes.” I saw a sly look. “But I am so weak I must ask you to feed them to me with your fingers. Actually, it is the fingers I want to taste.”

I did so, and did the same with bread and butter.

“I’ve tasted your lips and your fingers. Now, what about your Bristol cities?”

“They are ready when you are. And if you’d like your fingers to take a walk in the country—if you catch my drift—I am ready for that.”

“After dinner tomorrow?”

“Certainly. Now I’ll leave you, but not before giving you an injection.”

“I don’t need it.”

“Trust me. You say that now, but in a short while you will need it very much.” I gave Sir Reg his shot and held his hand until he slipped into sleep.

There was nothing more for me to do except go to my room. As was usual for me, I donned my kimono, wrote in my journals, and read until I was quite drowsy.

As I slipped into bed, I uttered a short prayer of thanks. Everyone had done so well today: Lister, Jack, Meg, Sir Reg, and me. Then I fell into a well-deserved sleep.

Wednesday, July 12, 1865

I arose early and dressed in my best nurse’s uniform. I peeked into Sir Reg’s bedroom and noted that he was sleeping soundly. Then I joined Meg in the kitchen for tea.

Jack had picked up Dr. Lister promptly at eight o’clock, so they joined us in the kitchen at a quarter past the hour.

“*Madainn mhath*. Good morning. *Ciamar a tha thu?* That is, how are you?”

“Better-most, Dr. Lister. Care for some tea?”

“Aye, Meg. Would ye have Brodies, from Leith, by any chance?”

“No. We have Darjeeling, sent by my sons in India. Or I can make you a pot of Lapsang souchong, which Westerners like even more than the Chinese. It’s a favorite of Miz Patricia’s.”

“The Darjeeling will be bonnie.” When the tea was ready, Meg poured.

“I’ll tell ye a fine tea story: There’s a boy in Glasgow, not more than seventeen years old. He’s serving as cabin boy on a steamer running between Glasgow and Belfast, and he writes me that he has heard stories from sailors about the United States of America. He wants to travel there and perhaps live there for a while.

Jack asked, “What of it?”

“I met him when I set his fractured arm. I found him to be the brightest laddie I know, and he loves two things—money and tea. Those, along with Scotch whiskey, of course, are the makings of a great Scotsman. Mind you, he’ll be famous in the tea trade one day.”

“What’s his name?”

“Thomas Lipton. You watch for him. Now, Nurse Goodman, let us visit the patient.”

“May we come, too? We haven’t seen him.”

“Of course. We shall form a delegation to visit the master of Folkestone Manor. But mind ye, don’t stay long. He and I have medical business to discuss.”

At Sir Reg’s door, Meg knocked, and we entered the room *en masse*. “Good morning, Sir Reg. We’re happy to see you.”

“No happier than I to see *you*. It seems that I have lived through the night.”

“How do you feel?”

“Surprisingly good, Meg, although there is persistent pain in my lower back.”

“I supposed that’s to be expected, Sir Reg, but I hear that it’s only temporary. Well, Jack and I must go. Just ring if you need anything.”

Lister spoke to Jack. “Will you extend that bell rope? Sir Reginald mustn’t stretch to reach it.”

“Certainly. Consider it done.” Meg and Jack left.

Dr. Lister queried Sir Reg as to pain, breathing, and sleeping. Then he said, “Now, let’s gently roll you over, I want to see my handiwork.” Lister removed the dressing, and nodded slowly.

“Good. There are no bad signs, and certainly no evil fluids expressed by the wound. Patricia, please change this dressing tomorrow. Paint the area with phenol. After a few moments wash the phenol away, as it is a great irritant to the skin.” I nodded.

“Young man, my opinion is that you are better off for the operation, which was rather difficult, as Nurse Goodman will no doubt share with you. Follow the regimen that I have left with her, and you will feel extraordinarily better in only a day or two. Most recovery will be evident during the passage of a few weeks. A full recovery is never certain.”

“Thank you, Dr. Lister. Thank you very much. You richly deserve your reputation.”

“Aye, I suppose I do, but keep in mind that not all patients survive their operations. We do what we can, but there are limits. Now, I’ve done all I can do here. I bid you goodbye.”

I asked, “Is there anything else, Doctor Lister?”

“Yes. Give your patient pills of opium. I don’t object to his eating a good dinner. You can save an injection for the evening.”

He turned to Sir Reg. “Eat dinner, but with these caveats: Do *not* attempt to dress, as it causes too much strain. Do *not* attempt to move to your wheelchair; let Jack Bates help. And above all, do *not* attempt to operate the wheels yourself. I don’t want my stitchery to come undone.”

Sir Reg nodded assent, and we left. We stopped in the library for a final interview.

“Well, nurse, it’s up to you now. There are three things: first, manage Sir Reginald’s pain. Second, be ever watchful for signs of infection. Third, if anything is awry, telegraph me immediately.”

“I can do those things.”

“Oh, and there’s a fourth: Write me regularly as to progress—if there is progress. I expect your patient will ultimately be free of pain.”

“What about walking?”

“As I wrote you at the first, it is unknown. The spinal cord was not severed, but the nerves have been compressed for a very long time. Now, I must go to my train.” He stood. Abandoning all decorum, I threw my arms around him and embraced him heartily. He seems quite surprised.

“Thank you so much! You have changed Sir Reg’s life—and mine!”

We found that Jack had brought the wagon to the front entry. All was ready. “I’ve put your suitcase of instruments in the wagon, doctor. All sterile and arranged in an orderly fashion.”

There were handshakes all around, and the men mounted the wagon. They began the short journey to Folkestone.

Back in the kitchen, I said, “Well, Meg, we have an achievement.”

“That’s so. Remember, Miz Patricia, it was you who wrote Dr. Lister, despite Sir Reginald having told you that the operation could not be done.”

“Yes, at the time, there was no reason to pay attention to what the doctors had told him, so indeed I paid no attention.”

“By the way, I put a cheque for £5,000 pounds in Lister’s bag of instruments.”

“Oh, Meg! A fine gesture. He will be very surprised when he discovers it. Imagine making that kind of money for working with a blacksmith’s hammer and punch!”

In my room, I integrated Dr. Lister’s medication and equipment—morphine and syringes—with my own collection. I had nothing else to do. Actually, I knew I had a great deal to plan, but my intention was to avoid rushing pell-mell into a scheme. I recalled that my mother frequently cautioned me, “Don’t just do something; stand there.”

At one o’clock, I went to the library. Sir Reg wasn’t there. Rather than show irrational concern, I simply sat myself and waited.

In a few moments, Sir Reg entered in his wheelchair, Jack pushing him. He was dressed in no more than his nightshirt.

“Why, good afternoon, Reg. You look rather sporty in that shirt. I fancy you appear rather like a pirate of the Caribbean Sea.”

“Arrr, me fair damsel. I have no cravat, and no pantaloons, either. And, as you see, my first mate Jack has pushed me here.”

“That is as it should be, Sir Reg. Now, how do you feel?”

“I have no pain or tingling in my legs. If anything, discomfort is centered at the site of the operation.”

Meg entered with the cart. “Ah, Nurse Bates, or may I call you ‘Meg?’ What do you have?”

“Rib chops of lamb, a gift from Mr. Simon Shepherd, of sheepherding fame. He wishes you a speedy recovery, and reminds you to practice your dancing, whatever that means. We’ll have a leg of lamb tomorrow. Now, our ribs are formed into a circle, a crown roast, with my stuffing inside. Our soup is made from tomatoes, the first from the garden, as fresh as can be, and with a hint of lemon. The rest—turnips, bread, butter, and fruit—is our typical fare. Oh, and to start ye off, here’s a nice plate of raw oysters, direct from the dock at Folkestone.”

Meg left, and as we ate, Sir Reg turned to me.

“Have you planned new tortures to help me heal?”

“I have several tasks planned for you.”

“Starting tomorrow, I presume.”

“No, sir. That would be premature. We will begin in earnest next week. My only plan is to visit you after lunch, as we agreed.”

Sir Reg gave me a long, slow, appraising look. I do believe I could describe it as a leer. He picked up a rib chop and slowly licked it, smiling at me all the while.

I smiled back. I raised an oyster shell to my lips, and tilted it into my mouth, so that the contents could slowly trickle in.

He took his chop and placed his teeth at the tip. He teased it and tore off the tiniest bit. He chewed it, with juices running down his chin.

I wiped his chin with my napkin, and then put an oyster to his lips. He slowly sucked the creature in. He extended his tongue to lick the shell, and then his smile was broader than ever.

I picked up one of my chops, licked it, sucked the end, and aggressively tore a piece of meat from it. As I chewed, juices ran down my chin, and he drew me closer with his hand so that he might lick the juices away.

We found ourselves laughing a good deal. I was very much reminded of a scene from *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, by Henry Fielding. I knew that book to be in Sir Reg's library, so it struck me that had read it, too.

I drank up my ale to wash down everything, wipe my hands and face, and stood. I was done.

"I'll see you at two o'clock, Tom, er... Reg."

"Yes, at two, Mrs. Waters, er... I mean Patricia." Please ring for Meg on the way out. And yes, I'll be sure to allow Jack to push me to my room."

I removed all my clothing, gave myself a glance in the mirror, and donned my white laboratory coat. There was no need to wear a uniform for the therapy I was about to administer.

At two o'clock I entered Sir Reg's bedroom. He was sitting up in his bed. I stood next to him.

"Hello, nurse. May I have a kiss?"

"Of course. Especially if kissing you will help you to heal. Now, please don't strain. I'll lean over."

Indeed, Sir Reg did not strain. As I leaned to kiss him he took my breasts by their sides and pulled me to him.

We pulled apart.

"You have a surprising amount of interest for a man with a limited sexual function."

"You mean 'no sexual function.' Well, I reason I wish for your kisses because of affection for you. I reach for your Bristol bits due to an urge, er..., that I cannot determine. However I'm doing nothing to fight it."

"Nor I. I rather like the attention. I might mention that in my rush to visit you I have forgotten all my clothing except for this laboratory coat."

"Excellent! Now, step away from the bed and remove that coat. I want to see all of you."

"Oh, my! Very well." I did as he asked.

"It is not night; there's no dim light. My God, you are so beautiful!

“You just haven’t seen a naked woman in a long time.”

“And I won’t need to see another one again. Now turn around, as I believe you have a backside.”

“As you wish. I fear you’ll find my bum too large.”

“Not at all. Take a step backward toward me and I’ll vote my approval.”

“Oh! OH!”

He was kissing my bottom, and placing his tongue between my buttocks. He stopped licking long enough to speak.

“Following your orders, I’m not to strain reaching around you, love. Come to the other side of the bed and lie down beside me.”

After weeks of directing Sir Reg’s activities, I was rather surprised at his directing mine.

“A proper Victorian woman would not do such a thing.”

“And are you a proper Victorian woman?”

“Given that I’m standing in front of you like an item in an Arabian slave market, I think not. No, not a bit.”

I went to the bed and lay down beside Sir Reg. We stared at each other. And brought our lips together. And kissed.

“You have a nice face, too.”

“Thank you for remembering. Now, go on to my bumpy bits, and mind you don’t nip too hard.”

We indulged in breast play similar to that of Saturday evening. In many respects the activity reminded me of my times with my Michael.

“Shall I touch your manhood?”

“My what?”

“Your manhood.”

“Arrrrggghhh! You sound like one of those dreadful romance novels.”

“Er, your penis, pecker, tool, flagpole, roger, willie, cock.”

“Much better.”

I fondled Reg. He fondled me.

“I’m afraid I cannot easily reach lower, or ask you to roll over, as I did the other night. I do admit it, nurse, that if I stretch too much, I feel bad signs from my lower back.”

“Then I’ll remain facing you. Why not close your eyes? We’ll nap together.”

We nodded off. I slept for about an hour and then rose. Sir Reg was sleeping very soundly. I was pleased that he was resting so much. There was no need to give him an injection; that could wait until evening.

I changed into a summer dress. I recorded all I could about Dr. Lister’s post-operation visit and departure.

It was not yet four o’clock, and as I had nothing to do for the rest of the day, I determined to walk to town. On the way, I stopped at the postal office to see Mr. Fowler. “Hello, Sam. How are you?”

“Hello, Patricia. It’s most excellent that you’ve dropped in. I have some news.” He gave me a wink.

“Does it concern the King of Bohemia?”

He laughed. “Absolutely! Mr. Grimstead, the young poet, has been sending enough telegrams to keep the London and Provincial Telegraph Co. Ltd. in business. One on Monday, two yesterday, and one today.”

“How interesting. That period coincides exactly with Dr. Lister’s visit.”

“Yes, and particularly, these messages were *not* sent to the general delivery. They were addressed to Miss Eustace Pleydell, Grosvenor Square, Mayfair, London.”

“Well, Sir Reginald’s sister seems to have taken quite an interest in Sir Reg’s well-being.”

“Yes. And there’s no attempt at a poetic disguise. For example, today’s message simply said, ‘Alive.’”

“I suspect, Mr. Fowler, that that one word troubles Miss Pleydell greatly.”

“I gather, of course, the Sir Reginald Pleydell is alive?”

“Yes, very much so. With excellent prospects for a complete recovery.”

“I’m quite glad of that.”

“For the moment, we will leave Mr. Grimstead in the dark. Now, Sam, I must go. But do keep your eyes and ears open.”

I decided to put off my visit to the village until tomorrow. I wanted to think about the telegrams. I left the postal office, and retraced my steps to Folkestone Manor.

As teatime approached, I peeked into Sir Reg’s room.

“Come in.”

“How do you feel?”

“Rather good. I’ve had an excellent nap. I dreamed that a naked woman was lying next to me.”

“Why, that dream must have been caused by morphine. Tell me, Reg, do you care for tea?”

“Certainly.”

“Then, please come to the dining room. I’ll ask Jack to help you.”

I left and went to the kitchen, looking for Jack. Good luck! Jack had just come in from the barn. I arranged for Jack to move Sir Reg and then went to the library. To my surprise and consternation, Sir Reg was already there!

“Where’s Jack?”

“Looking for me, I should imagine.”

“How did you get to the library?”

“Through the conservatory, and under my own power.”

“Well, did you injure yourself?”

“Not at all. Rather, I find my pride healing fast. I am quite accustomed to driving this chair.”

Meg entered with her cart. She stopped, returned to the hall, and shouted, “I’ve found him, Jack!”

Jack fairly bounded in. “Excuse me, Major Pleydell, are you aware of what we do to soldiers who disobey orders?”

“We shoot them, as I recall, Colour Sergeant Bates. However, sometimes the orders must be changed. From now on, I shall drive my own wheelchair. Further, I order you and Meg to join me in a drink.”

Jack shrugged, went to the bookshelves, and brought whiskey and glasses.

“To your health—and mine!” We drank. “Now, Meg, what’s for tea?”

“Something hearty for the recovering patient and his long-suffering nurse: a rich, thick stew of beef, potatoes, and carrots. There are greens from the garden, covered with what Julia calls ‘French dressing,’ which is merely a mixture of oil and vinegar. And there’s bread and butter, of course. If these items don’t heal you, Sir Reg, I don’t know what will.”

Sir Reg and I ate without playing with our food. When we finished, I directed his schedule. “When you decide to retire to your room, Sir Reg, please ring for me. I’ll come to give you an injection, possibly the last one you’ll need.”

“I can do that.”

“If you must, drive your chair to the bedroom, but please allow me to help you into bed.” With that, I stood, bent over him, and gave him a gentle kiss.

At nine o’clock, the bell sounded. I went to Reg’s bedroom, where, to my delight, I found him seated in his wheel chair. I bent over, had him put his arms around my neck, and straightened. He lifted out of the chair and swung to the bed. At that point, it was quite easy to move his legs and adjust the bedclothes.

It took only a moment to administer his morphine. I gave him a kiss. "There, my love. Now, good night." I waited until he drifted off, and then returned to my bedroom.

As I undressed, I realized that I was as nearly exhausted as I had been after the surgery. Yet I was filled with a marvelous feeling that things were turning out well. It remained "only" for me to help Sir Reg walk again. I had no idea how formidable a task that was to be.