

## 15. The Unexpected

**Thursday, August 31, 1865**

Every day of the last week had been good! Each one seemed to bring a new miracle. It mattered not what the weather was or what food was served. My main occupation was promoting Sir Reg's walking, and that was an enormously fulfilling task. On August 25th, we had "crossed the Rubicon," so to speak. Sir Reg could not remain an invalid. It was clear to both of us that his days in a wheelchair were numbered.

When not working with Sir Reg, I spent a good deal of time playing with him. We read to each other and played backgammon. We sometimes sat on the apron outside my room, holding hands, feeling the breeze, and simply looking at the meadows, forest, lake, and sky.

Of course, there was another kind of play—that which took place in Sir Reg's bedroom. I found to my great satisfaction that his "vigor," as Dr. Wong called it, persisted. Although my intention in visiting his room in the afternoons was to give him massages, he frequently ended up massaging *me*. I was a woman who, having spent ten years in the desert, so to speak, now found herself at an oasis! I shall not belabor the point, but simply state that we were both very happy.

Today, Meg served a wonderful dinner. We had oysters, grouse, and cooked greens, the birds being provided by Dan Dover and the greens being supplied by Jedediah Green. I was delighted that Sir Reg asked Jack and Meg to join us, as circumstances had promoted our becoming a very close-knit family.

Julia had made French pastries called *éclairs*. They were long, cream-filled choux pastry items. Meg and I shot each other knowing glances as we bit the ends and sucked the filling out. Fortunately, the men didn't notice.

**Friday, September 1, 1865**

I spent a portion of the morning in my day room making entries in my journals. Sir Reg now took no pain medications, his diet was good, and we frequently exercised together. While it might be too soon to declare a victory, I felt that his progress would henceforth proceed rapidly.

This morning in my study, I was interrupted by a knock. "Come in. Why, Simon! Good morning. How are you feeling?"

"Very well, Miz Patricia. As you know, my calf is well-healed."

"And how is young Tom Brown doing?"

"He's better-most. I cannot account for it, but throughout the month of August, he did exceedingly well in his work. He stays clean and is quite polite. He even apologized for throwing stones at me in the past."

"That's excellent, Simon. I'm very glad to hear this." *Perhaps*, I thought, *Tom's session with Meg and me had a positive influenced on him.*

"And he continues to exhibit behavior that any shepherd would envy. If a sheep goes missing, he seems to know just where to go to find it. I've asked him how he does it, and all he can tell me is that he simply trusts his feelings." Simon paused. "However, I've come to see you today about a different concern."

"Tell me about it, then."

"I had a disturbing dream last night. You, Sir Reg, and a man were in it.

"That doesn't seem unusual. What was disturbing?"

"First, the man. He was dressed in dark clothing. I couldn't see his face, but I felt the presence of evil. Secondly, I'm disturbed that I saw no outcome. I had no sense that I was part of the scene, which is often the case with my dreams. As I've mentioned before, such visions—without me and with no obvious outcome—usually indicate trouble to come." He attempted a smile. "Perhaps this is just silliness and means nothing."

"Simon, I do not doubt your dreams, or premonitions, if you will. You were spot on about the location of the shrapnel in Sir Reginald's spine, and on Monday, June 19th, I believe you told Sir Reg that you planned to see him dance. That is now not just a possibility, but will very likely become a certainty. Trust me, Simon, I shall keep this revelation in mind and act on it if necessary."

Simon left me. I thought for some moments, considering what his dream might mean. An idea struck me, and a minute later, I rose and went to the barn to talk with Jack.

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I had dinner with Reginald. I was determined to say nothing to him about Simon's dream. Perhaps, as Simon said, it was just silliness, meaning nothing. Besides, I had another task to perform.

I began by setting the stage. "Darling, the food is excellent today. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Why, yes it is."

"And I think your exercises have given you an attractive, firm body."

"Well, yes, I suppose they have."

"Would you say you've made progress with walking?"

Reg gave me an odd look. "Indeed, I'm making great strides, if you'll excuse the pun."

It was time to strike! "Good! You owe me five pounds!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"You heard me, my love. Exactly ten weeks ago, to the day, I made a bet with you. I have won. Now pay up, sweetheart!"

"Patricia, I don't remember any such bet."

I went to him and gave him a long kiss. "I suspected that you would say that. Shall I refresh your memory?"

"*Must* you? Again? Oh, very well.

"I'll be brief. It were on Friday, the 23rd day of June, guv'nor. You thanked me for your progress, but I said that that was very much due to *your* efforts. Then I said I had more things in mind for you. Your response: 'Nurse! Am I to be spared nothing? Surely there has been great progress made already?' My rejoinder: 'Yes, there has. However, I will not rest... until... you... walk.' Now, do you recall the conversation?"

“Er, it does seem familiar.”

“My love, you called walking impossible. I said that was a pile of Tom Tit. Do you remember?”

“Yes. I suppose I do.”

Then you’ll remember these words, in reference to ‘impossible.’ ‘Say that again in ten weeks. In fact, I’ll bet you five pounds.’ And, sir, it has been ten weeks.”

Sir Reg laughed. “Yes, yes. And you asked me to be a gentlemen when I lost my money. And we shook hands on it.”

Sir Reg’s recalling that sentenced startled me a bit, but I continued, “Well, guv’nor. I want me Lady Godiva. Give me a fiver.”

Sir Reg reached into a waistcoat pocket, removed a crisp £5 note, and handed it to me. “I believe this is now yours.”

I stammered, “You had the note in your...? You were ready with...? You knew...?”

Sir Reg laughed. “My love, my dearest dear, you aren’t the only one with a fine memory. Of course I knew.”

I laughed, too. There remained nothing for us to do but trade several long kisses.

### **Saturday, September 2, 1865**

On Saturday morning, about o’clock, I sat in the kitchen, having a cup of tea and some toasted bread with Meg. Jack burst in.

“Quick, Patricia! The game is afoot!”

“What do you mean, Jack?”

“One of the gamekeepers just informed me that Uriah Grimstead has entered the woods. He is now behind the barn.”

I went to a window to take a look. “Ah, Jack. Would that dark form in the distance be Grimstead?”

“I believe so. Now please go to your bedroom, not your study. I’ll bring you the items we discussed.”

I did as Jack told me. In less than a minute he arrived with a stack of clothes and accessories.

“Here we have one of Sir Reg’s suits, with boots and all. I’ll turn me back while you change.”

“No need to, Jack. I know for a fact that Master Jack doesn’t turn his back.” With that, I quickly stripped off my dress and put the suit on. The trousers, of course, were rather long for me, but the shirt, waistcoat, and coat fit rather well. I presumed that my bosom in some way mimicked Sir Reg’s broad chest.

I quickly tied my hair behind my head and tucked it into a top hat, very much like the ones Prince Albert favored.

“There! How do I look?”

“Fine. I’ll roll up the legs of the trousers a bit.” He did so. “Now let me tie your cravat.”

I took Sir Reg’s ebony and silver cane and walked with Jack to the kitchen, out the door, and to the barn. I made sure to walk vigorously, and I pretended to converse with Jack. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the dark form shrink into the woods.

Jack and I saddled Old Gray and led her to the barnyard. I mounted the mare and rode in a circle several times. When done, I dismounted, gave Jack’s hand an energetic shake, and strode into the manor house. I must say, my performance rivaled that of an actress in the Covent Garden district of London.

Perhaps one-half hour later, Jack joined Meg and me in the kitchen. “Now, Patricia, will you tell us what that was all about?”

“Grimstead, as you know, is a spy. He is also an irritant. I decided to force his hand. By playing the role of Sir Reginald—a *walking* Sir Reginald, mind you—I hope I have succeeded in provoking him to action.”

“What do we do now?”

“Nothing. We wait.”

#### **Monday, September 4, 1865**

This morning, I walked to the village to check for mail at the postal office.

“Hello, Sam. Do you have any letters or parcels for me?”

Sam gave me a wink. “No. I’ve something better.”

“For the sake of the King of Bohemia, you must tell me.”

“Saturday afternoon, a young man dashed in here to send a telegram to Grosvenor Square, in the Mayfair district of London. It was, he told me, quite urgent.”

“I surmise that it was a message of some consequence.”

“So it would seem. The message is brief and a rather cryptic. Let me show the telegram to you. See? ‘He walks! He rides! UG.’ And there you have it.”

“Excellent, Sam! I’ll not shock you by covering you with kisses, as I did when Dr. Lister’s telegram arrived, but merely give you my sincere thanks. We shall see what happens next.”

#### **Tuesday, September 5, 1865**

The day was lovely and I had an excellent morning session with Sir Reg. Being free until dinner, I went to the kitchen. Meg’s pots were bubbling, so she was sitting. Julia was, I noticed, preoccupied with baking.

“Good morning, Julia. How are you?”

"I'm better-most, Mrs. Goodman. I'm making some extra bread for the shepherds. I should like Tom Brown, especially, to eat well. That's why I've cooked jam to go with the bread."

"Patricia, let's take some tea in your study. The dinner is mostly cooked, and I've some pleasant topics to share."

"Excellent, Meg. I have some well."

Meg prepared a cart and I pushed it to my room. When we were seated and had served ourselves, I said, "What is the news?"

"I've been saving one story for you, and in the time that's passed, Providence has blessed me with a second one. For the first one, it was Thursday last, as I recall. I made up a basket of food for Tom Brown. I found our flock at the edge of the far woods."

"And?"

"The young man was very polite. He thanked me for the food, and then with a bit of hesitation, he asked for some 'counseling.' As you know, we had promised him that."

"Yes, that's right. And did you help him?"

"Indeed I did. I first 'helped' him by taking off my dress. He was aching to see my giant Bristol bits and kiss me buttocks. Then came a surprise."

"I'm already surprised. What was the next thing?"

"He wanted to lick me cock-pit and learn how it was best done. He had gotten a hint of the routine from Jim Hawkins, the stable boy. So, what could I do, Miz Pat? I lay back, pulled his head to me, and told him exactly what to do. He knew he had succeeded when me spasms finally ceased."

"Oh, Meg! You are very accommodating. Was that the end of it?"

"Just one more thing. The fellow had worked so hard on me, I felt obliged to return the favor. I swear, Patricia, it had never been done to him before. I thought he'd faint."

"Meg, I marveled at you the day I arrived here, and I still do!"

"Now this is all the first part. There's more."

"No, surely there is no more."

"Yes, there's more. I told Jack about this, and he got quite a laugh over my excesses. On Friday, he went to the meadow to talk with Tom. Now the way Jack tells it, when Tom first saw him, he must have thought that Jack had come to kill him."

"I gather that Jack didn't kill him."

"No, he didn't. He asked Tom if he'd like to join him and me in the barn come evening. For something diverting."

Understanding, I nodded. “No!”

“Of course, Tom’s not well schooled. Jack had to explain what ‘diverting’ meant.”

“And then?”

“At dusk, Tom came to our special ‘party’ in the barn. Master Jack taught him some techniques and I was doubly satisfied—if you catch my drift.”

“Outrageous. Meg, I must fan myself, or I’ll faint. Now, wait a moment, and I will update you about a prediction of Simon Shepherd’s, and a curious telegram sent by Mr. Uriah Grimstead.”

#### **Thursday, September 7, 1865**

I entered the library and found Sir Reg seated in a conventional chair.

“Reg, where’s your wheelchair?”

“What wheelchair? What’s a wheelchair?”

“Oh! You are quite a wag aren’t you?” I gave him a peck on the cheek. “I kiss you, although I’m not sure you deserve it. Now tell me, did Jack take it away after you wheeled yourself in?”

“No. I walked here. The process was a bit slow, but I did it on my own.”

I gave him a long, lingering kiss on the lips.

#### **Saturday, September 9, 1865**

In the middle of the afternoon, I determined to visit Betty Bourne. There was sufficient time, I reasoned, to call for mail, enjoy a conversation with her, and return in time for tea.

At the postal office, Sam provided me with a bit of news which was not a surprise. Mr. Grimstead, he told me, had received a telegram from Mayfair. It had said only, “It has begun. Report when done.” While I couldn’t fathom the meaning, I was confident that my acting the role of Reginald walking and riding had prompted a reaction and some sort of new action.

The Canterbury road was, to my surprise, crowded with people! Ah, this must be the predicted influx of seasonal laborers who took special trains from London to participate in our hop harvest. I crossed the Canterbury Road, and paused at the greengrocers long enough to offer a hello to Edna and Alice Green. They confirmed my theorem about the harvesters. Both they and the Browns, the general grocers, were selling foodstuffs in abundance.

I walked to Betty’s home and found her preparing pub grub against the crowds that would gather at The White Horse and The Black Horse in the evening. Rather than interrupt her work, I joined in. We prepared cockles, clams, eels, boiled eggs, and potatoes in jackets. “What else is there, Betty?”

“Just two things, both experiments. First, I’m frying slices of *zucca* squash I got from Viola Zamboni. See, I dip them in a fritter batter and toss them into the pan. Look at them sputter and turn brown. This will be a new item for our ‘gourmands’ at the two pubs. I doubt that they’ll care for the flavor, and this item will soon fade from memory—theirs and mine.”

“What’s the second thing?”

“I have a great quantity of fried chicken wings from Harry Sanderson’s Pie and Chicken House. He tells me that the wing is the least popular part of the chicken.”

“Then the pub patrons won’t like them.”

“But here’s a difference, Patricia. I am coating them with the spiciest sauce I can muster, made primarily from the cayenne pepper from India, although in truth, it’s named for the city of Cayenne in French Guiana. Our Nicholas Culpeper mentioned the peppers in the ‘Complete Herbal’ in 1653.”

“Won’t the spiciness make the pubgoers uncomfortable?”

“I count on it. After they eat a couple of these, Nick and Ned Bowles will sell plenty of ale.”

We packed four large baskets and left for the pubs, Betty and I each carrying two. We delivered to The White Horse, which, despite its crowd, was fairly sedate. At The Black Horse, the story was different. It was a good deal rowdier and noisier than The White Horse.

That rowdiness elevated when we, two rather attractive and well-dressed women, made our entrance. There were whistles and huzzahs!

As I turned, I glanced for at a corner of the pub. I paled. “Come, Betty. We must leave. Instantly.”

Once outside, Betty said, “Patricia, what is it?”

“A man. A man in black. I saw a man in black sitting in the corner.”

“Well, what of it?”

“I think it’s the same man who followed me around London in the week before I arrived here.”

“Oh, Patricia! You are doubtless mistaken. These men are all from London, and many wear black. Now let’s return to my house for a quick ale, and I’ll send you home with some food.”

Perhaps I was mistaken, yet I remained shaken. When I arrived at Folkestone Manor, I shared my feelings with Jack and Meg.

### **Sunday, September 10, 1865**

In the morning Sir Reg and I engaged in a wheelchair race down the full length of Folkestone Manor’s hall. Jack officiated the start and Meg the finish. As usual, Sir Reg won, but I finished only inches behind him.

Sir Reg ordered Jack to take all wheelchairs—his original one, our two racers, and the standing chair—to the barn for storage. He said, “Jack, you can break them up or give them away. I won’t need them again.”

At dinner, Meg served what I must call a banquet. She had planned a roasted joint of beef, with fresh lobsters from Folkestone. But she augmented these dishes with a sliced Wiltshire ham, a cheese called Stinking Bishop, potatoes, turnips, parsnips, pease porridge, greens, bread, butter, and cake. We drank ale and whiskey.

To my great surprise, Reg had asked Jack to locate Simon Shepherd and Tom Brown to invite them to dinner. We were therefore a party of six, and we fairly stuffed ourselves!

Our sheepherding friends were quite well-mannered. Incidentally, it struck me that Tom had never eaten with an earl before, but he was a perfect gentleman. All went well, and the young men left the manor with the best baskets of left-over food they had had in their lives.

### **Monday, September 11, 1865**

It seemed that hardly a morning passed without a visitor coming to my study. Today, it was Tom Brown.

“Why Tom, it was good to see you at dinner yesterday, and it’s nice to see you again! Please sit and tell me what’s new with you.”

“Well, Mrs. Goodman, I am becoming a good shepherd, or at least Simon says so. He tells me he sees a bright future for me. That’s important to him if he should go to America.”

“America?”

“Yes, he has considered the possibility, but can confirm nothing. He tells me that his dreams never reveal his personal future. But I will tell you that he has been learning about sheep in America from Alice Green.”

“Oh! I see. I recall that she is fond of sheep, and the United States as well. And would you like to go to America?”

“No, I think not. I have found something, or someone, rather, to, er, divert me.”

“Indeed. And may I ask who that might be?”

“Julia Prang.”

I stared. “Why, Tom, I am very surprised. I hope you two grow closer.”

“She rather excites me, which brings me to the purpose of my visit.”

“Do you need the ‘counseling’ I promised? I thought Meg Bates was lending a hand—if you’ll pardon the pun—with that.”

“Oh, yes, she has done so! I visit you because I would benefit if you were to judge a technique of mine. You see, I have learned from Jim Hawkins in the stable that there are ways to avoid, er...”

“Having your favorite ewe bring forth a lamb in the spring, my young ram?”

“Er, yes. Exactly. The old in-out in-out will do that. I know you told Jim and Mary so.”

“I did. Well, me bucko, you could put it up her Khyber Pass.”

“Ma’am, that’s for lewdies, or for men. Even I know that.”

“Yes, that’s largely true, although sometimes fun for a woman. Well, how can I help you?”



"If I were to play 'doctor' for a few minutes, and you were to play 'patient,' you would see.

I agreed. On Tom's order, I consented to remove every stitch of my clothing and lie upon my table. As instructed, I placed my hips very close to the edge of the table, raised my feet to the tabletop, and spread my legs wide.

"Well, 'doctor,' I feel very exposed."

"You are that, Miz Patricia. My mate Simon Shepherd says that a nurse once told him, 'If I can't see it I can't fix it.'"

With that, he brought his face to my crotch. He took a handful of each of my breasts, leaving his thumbs free to rub my nipples. By pulling on my Bristol bits, he drew his face closer, and he commenced a series of licks and nips. My God, he even used his nose!

I must say, Tom was effective. Meg must have taught him well. In only seconds I was rocking my hips to accommodate him. Indeed, what else could I do? As I came close to a climax, I pulled his face tight into me and arched my back. We spent a few moments suspended and then I lowered myself to the table.

"Well, was that satisfactory?"

"Tom, you are extraordinary! You exceed the efforts of even my husband ten years ago, and he was very good. Shall I return the favor?"

"No, Miz Patricia. The favor has been in your tellin' me what you think."

"Well, at the least, I shall lick that fluid off your face, and dry you with a towel."

I did so, and gave Tom a peck on the cheek. After he left, I spent a few moments pondering how much the unruly, rude boy I met in June had changed.

### **Wednesday, September 13, 1865**

Tuesday proved to be uneventful. Today was likely to be the same. I had not gone into the village, as I had no pressing reason to do so. Further, I had no desire to imagine a black-clad stranger behind every rock or bush. After all, Betty Bourne was no doubt correct: our village was filled with simple working people, here for the hop harvest, and they embodied all shapes, sizes, and manner of dress.

As usual, the air was filled with the sound of birds, but at 8:30 AM precisely, the birdsong was replaced by a great deal of hammering. I walked through my French doors and saw Jack and his groundsmen.

"Jack, what's that you're doing?"

Jack left the men and explained to me, "We're putting in fasteners along the foundation of the manner."

"Whatever for?"

"To try an important experiment, Miz Patricia. I'm not a man of science, but I rely on an education I received from Sam Fowler at the telegraph office. Tell me, d'ye ken how a telegraph works?"

"The London and Provincial Telegraph Company? No, I haven't a clue."

“A ‘battery,’ as Dr. Franklin in America described it, is a group of electrical devices that hold electricity, first invented by a bloke named Volta in Italy in 1800. That’s what it takes to send a message. Well, I’ve now got a battery in my bedroom, and six hundred feet of telegraph wire. We’ll be stringing wires from my bedroom to your room and Sir Reg’s.”

“What on earth for, Jack?”

“Because I believe that both Simon Shepherd’s warning and your seeing a man in black at The Black Horse on Saturday is a cause for concern. If there is the slightest trouble about the manor, pull on your bell cord or ask Sir Reg to pull on his. No normal bell will ring. Instead, a loud *electric* bell will ring in our bedroom.”

“Thank you, Jack. You do a great deal to allay the fears of a potentially silly woman.”

“Trust me, ma’am. I’ll speak as a Colour Sergeant: When you face an enemy and a trooper tells you he heard ‘something’ near the lines, you do not ignore it.”

### **Friday, September 15, 1865**

For several days now, the harvest had been taking place in full. This period was Hawkinge’s liveliest time, and the oasts were filling with hops for drying.

I walked the estate, Barnhurst Lane, and the bluffs. All was as before, except that I now wore a light cape, under which I kept my Colt revolver. I sometimes thought I saw a black mass in the woods, but when I stared, it seemed to disappear. I presumed I had a rather active imagination.

### **Sunday, September 17, 1865**

Today was a lovely Sunday. Both dinner and tea were pleasant, and Sir Reg and I had spent several hours together in the library. Now, in my bedroom, I was disturbed. This was very odd, because nothing had occurred to distress me. I cannot account for it. Perhaps I was disturbed at finding no reason to be disturbed.

Although it grew quite late, I couldn’t sleep. I was tired, and I found that reading gave me no respite. Finally, I contented myself to merely lie in my bed in the dark, remaining awake.

I heard a noise, a rustling in the bushes, somewhere between my room and Sir Reg’s. That confirmed my suspicion that I was a foolish young woman, imagining an assailant at every turn and behind every tree.

Then I heard the distinct crack of a foot, or paw, stepping upon a large twig. Now that was *not* my imagining. I rose quietly, went to my bureau, and removed my Colt. An animal might be prowling, and I intended to find out what it was. As you might reason, an unloaded pistol is useless. Mine was fully loaded.

As I stepped outside my French doors, I could see nothing. I had no choice but to creep carefully and quietly along the stone apron, hoping for a sight of something.

I reached Sir Reg’s French doors. They were open, and this was most odd, for as the nights were growing cooler, he particularly enjoyed having them closed.

My despair over having no way to see ended abruptly. A light shone upon the sleeping Sir Reg. A dark lantern, with a sliding shutter to hide the light until needed!

I saw not only Sir Reg and a lantern, but there was as well a man in black, wielding a long ugly knife. He raised it over Sir Reg's chest.

I shouted "STOP! I HAVE A PISTOL AIMED AT YOUR HEAD!"

Ignoring me, the man lunged. Fortunately, a broad forearm parried the lunge, and a huge fist contacted the man squarely in the face. He dropped to the floor.

"Huzzah! That's one for our side!" Sir Reg, ever the warrior, rose instantly from a lying position. As he did, he reached under his pillow.

Reg shouted, "STOP! I HAVE A PISTOL AIMED AT YOUR HEAD." He leveled his Beaumont-Adams revolver at the man groaning on the floor.

Sir Reg tugged on the bell pull. An incredibly loud electric bell rang throughout the manor. Although the assailant attempted to rise and run, he tripped on a pair of my pantalettes, which I had neglected to collect after my last "massage" with Sir Reg.

Sir Reg lit his kerosene lamp, and the man recoiled, much as would a cockroach under a bright light. I must say, without wishing to seem cliché, that he was a dirty, evil-looking fellow.

Jack and Meg arrive with a lantern—and a shot gun. Jack stepped forward and said, "STOP! I HAVE A SHOT GUN AIMED AT YOUR HEAD." Jack made an understatement, as the muzzle of his gun was perhaps an inch from the man's nose. At last the man stopped moving.

I studied the man and spoke. "Well, sir. I do believe we've met before. Was London dull for you? Did you decide to vacation in the country?" The man remained silent.

Sir Reg said, "Meg, please fetch the constable. Jack, you may help by placing your foot on this good fellow's neck."

"I ain't sayin' nothin'."

I spoke: "Good, sir. You have the right to remain silent. If you make a single false move, I shall render you permanently silent. Now, I haven't shot this pistol in such a long time. It might go off at any second if something startled me. So I seem to be your worst nightmare—a woman with a handgun."

Sir Reg said, "I cannot help you, stranger. She's terribly erratic with a pistol."

It appeared that Meg rode like thunder. In twenty minutes, or perhaps less, she was back with Constable Dan Dover. "Hello! What have we here? Unless my eyes deceive me, I believe it's Bull Pemphigoid.

"Do you know him?"

"Why, yes! We've met professionally many times over the years. This is Bullous Aloysius Pemphigoid, or 'Bull,' if you will. Late of the Old Bailey and Newgate Prison."

Bull struggled to get up. Dan twirled his baton and gave the man a vicious blow to his calf. The man collapsed to the floor. He put the baton at Bull's throat.

“Don’t do anything rash, Bull. Do you like my truncheon? It’s called an espantoon, a gift from my friend, Sergeant Mattson of the Baltimore Police Department. It’s great fun to twirl, and it will split your head easier than shucking a Chesapeake Bay oyster.”

“Oh, I recognize you. Dover, the Peeler.”

“Not ‘Peeler’ any more, Bull. It’s Constable Dover, my man. I am the law in these parts. So, the sewers of London must be full up and you’ve come to Kent to make trouble.”

“You don’t scare me, Dover. I’ve done nothing wrong.”

“Bull, me bucko, putting a knife to a man’s throat in the middle of the night *is* doing something wrong.”

“Prove it.”

“I’ve got two witnesses and my personal knowledge of your pathetic criminal record. And I have more.”

“How so?”

“I know who hired you. I know whose spying prompted that person to send you here. You’re freakin’, friggin’, frappin’ pinched, my man. And here’s a bonus for you, you stupid git: my brother is a judge at the Crown Court in Canterbury.”

“I hain’t yer man.”

“No, sir, you are not. You are my lawful prey. Hold ‘em out, Bull, for the darbies.” Bull had no choice. Constable Dover handcuffed him.

“Now, Jack, hitch up your buckboard and we’ll head to the gaol. Also, I have one more conspirator to collar tonight.”

Dan Dover and Jack moved Bull Pemphigoid out of the room.

I said, “Well, Reg and Meg, that wasn’t too bad, now was it?”

Incredulous, they stared at me. Then Sir Reg began to laugh. Meg joined in. I hugged them both and kissed them both. I returned to my bedroom, and then hurried to my study. I was too worked up to sleep, and the elements of a plan were forming in my mind. Later, I went to Sir Reg’s bedroom and joined him under the covers.

### **Monday, September 18, 1865**

I arrived at the postal and telegraph office at 8:00 AM precisely.

“Good morning, Patricia.”

“Good morning Sam. Now give me the handshake of the agents of the King of Bohemia. I have something vital for you to do.”

“What do you want?”

“Please send this message instantly to Mayfair, London. You know the exact address. ‘The gravest event has occurred. Come to Folkestone Manor immediately. UG.’ That should produce the action I desire.”

“But Patricia, you are not ‘UG.’ What will I do if he attempts to send a telegram?”

“That’s unlikely to happen, Sam. Constable Dover has him locked up in the gaol, for conspiracy to commit murder.”

“Oh my God! Consider it done. You may wait, if you wish, while I transmit this message.” After Sam sent the telegram, I proceeded to the city hall, where I enlisted Dan Dover in my plan.

## **Tuesday, September 19, 1865**

It was well understood that the 10:07 AM train of the South Eastern Railway was the train of choice for travelers from London who wanted to arrive early in Folkestone. I rather counted on this, and was not disappointed.

At eleven o’clock, a hack arrived at Folkestone Manor. I had no shred of doubt as to who occupied it. My “cast of characters” was in readiness, and I wore my somber nurse’s uniform. I went to the parlor. In a moment, Meg conducted two people there. The first, of course, was Eustace Pleydell, Sir Reginald’s sister.

Eustace Pleydell had not improved in appearance. She was stuffed into a fashionable brocade with too much trim and too many flounces. She was accompanied by the same balding man I had met once before. The man had retained his affection for dull brown suits. She looked at me with an expression I can only name as loathing.

In my saddest voice I said, “Oh, Miss Pleydell, it so good that you have come.”

“Why have I been summoned?”

“That is a question you best ask of Mr. Uriah Grimstead. But I believe I have the answer. Please seat yourself. I have a bit of a shock for you. Something dreadful has taken place.” Did I see a faint smile upon her face?

“What is it?”

I pretended to sniffle. “I should like the constable and justice of the peace to inform you.” I opened the parlor door.

“Good morning, Miss Pleydell I am Daniel Dover. Your poor brother...”

“...has met with foul play?”

“Has avoided an attempt upon his life. Now I should like to know if you would care to be put under arrest?”

“What? I beg your pardon! Upon what charge?”

“Conspiracy to commit murder.”

“Against whom?”

“Your brother, Sir Reginald Pleydell of Hawkinge, Kent.”

“That, you pipsqueak, is preposterous. I shall see you removed from office, to be sure.”

“Miz Pleydell, I shall see you spending the rest of your life at Newgate Prison. That’s only a mile or two from Grosvenor Square, so perhaps your friends can visit you there.”

“You are unforgivably insulting, Constable.”

“As is my intention. Now, acquaint yourself, or reacquaint yourself, I should say, with your partners in crime.”  
He went to the doorway and signaled.

Jack Bates pushed Bull Pemphigoid and Uriah Grimstead into the room, both in manacles. Bull kept his eyes on the floor; Uriah was pale and shaking.

“I point out to you that Bull Pemphigoid, the assassin, has confessed to attempted murder, and declares that you hired him. Uriah Grimstead, the spy, has confessed to his role, and, again, that you hired him. And there are two eye witnesses to the crime, including your brother, the intended victim. And so, as they say, Miz Pleydell, the jig is up.”

Sir Reginald sailed into the room, with Meg Bates close behind.

“You’re alive!”

“Yes, no thanks to you.”

“You are walking.”

“That and much more, I assure you.”

“That is impossible.”

“Yet it seems to be the truth, dear sister. All this has happened through the good works of Nurse Patricia Goodman, whom, upon your last visit, you had the bad taste to call a whore.”

“You should have died by now.”

“That is your fondest wish. Indeed, I should have remained infirm and wasted away, but as you see, that is not the case. As a consequence, your will not inherit my estates or money.”

“Why, dear brother, I assure you that I never wanted you to decline, nor did I ever wish to take your money.”

“And I assure you that you have lied since we were in swaddling clothes, and that you haven’t changed a bit. Now, who is this person you have brought along? A paid mourner, perhaps?”

“I’m Crenel. Ebenezer Crenel, of the lawfirm of Merlon and Crenel, London. I am Miss Pleydell’s solicitor.”

“Good. I’ll speak directly to you. Although I’m quite upset that someone should attempt to plunge a dagger into my heart in the dead of night, I will set that aside. Rather than create a scandal, I am prepared to do the following. Listen attentively, Crenel.

“First, you and my solicitor in London will meet to draw up a permanent, irrevocable agreement.

“Second, in that agreement, I shall deed to Miss Eustace Pleydell an excellent large estate, the one in Nottinghamshire, I think. It yields, er, how much, Meg?”

“About £20,000 per annum.”

“Good. That will be your income, Eustace. I hope you will not run the estate into the ground. Perhaps you should live there, hire a lusty foreman, and take a lesson from the heifers and mares—if you catch my drift.

“Third, Crenel, the agreement will stipulate that Eustace Pleydell will have the good taste *never* to visit or write me again. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir. Completely.”

As this conversation took place, I noticed that Eustace’s face was displaying an entirely new palette of shades of red. She screamed, “YOU HAVE NO HEIR! I will still inherit all! You have no wife! You have no heir!”

“But I will. The first before the day is out, and the second soon after.” He turned toward me, gestured, and turned back to his sister. “I believe you have met already met my *fiancée*, Mrs. Goodman.”

There was no longer a need to describe a full spectrum of reds. Her face was uniformly crimson. She was shaking, sputtering, and practically spitting. She rose and went to the parlor door. “You haven’t heard the last from me!”

“Yes I have, sister.”

She strode out, tripping only once. She was followed by Crenel, who turned to Sir Reg. I swear that a small smile crossed his face. He said, “I’ll be in touch.” He also winked.

We saw the hack pull away and Sir Reg pulled me close. Then Dover spoke to his prisoners: “Well, you two pails of slops, Sir Reginald has spared you a prison term. Now, here’s your future: Jack Bates and I will drive you directly to the railway station. You’re going to take a little ride in the cars. To ensure that your worthless bums do indeed leave my village and go to London, I will make the trip with you. At Charing Cross station, I will unlock your manacles and leg shackles.

“You, Grimstead, had best leave the station instantly. For you, Bull, I’ll have bobbies there, as I’m quite sure that they will want to have a nice talk with you.”

They left, as did Meg and Jack. Sir Reg and I were alone. “Excuse me, Sir Reginald. That was a fine speech you made in front of your sister, but I don’t recall being asked for my hand in marriage?”

“Oh, yes. I suppose that was presumptuous of me. You’ve given me all the rest of your body, so I must have concluded that your hand came with it.” He knelt.

“I can barely believe it. You’re kneeling!”

“I have practiced. Now quiet, you. I must make a speech. Patricia, you arrived here on June 5th of this year...”

“It was June 6th.”

"Please bear with me, and please stay quiet. You arrived here on *June 6th* of this year and I engaged you as a nurse. I admit that my only occupations at that time were taking laudanum, drinking, and waiting to die. So very much has changed since then, and the changes are due entirely to your efforts.

"I will not recount for you the many little things you've done or even your arranging for my surgical operation. I will, however, cite your tireless efforts and your unflagging hope for me. The results are two: I very much love life again, and I very much love you."

"And so, Sir Reg..."

"So?"

"Is there anything else?"

"Oh, yes, of course! Excuse me, but I've never done this before. Will you marry me? I would be honored and happy beyond all accounting if you would consent to be my wife."

It seemed like a good time to tease Sir Reg. "I don't know." He started. "What do you offer?"

"A title."

"I don't need one."

"Money."

"I don't want it."

"All my love forever."

I was silent. I waited a few moments. Reg was growing uncomfortable.

"Patricia..." I stayed silent. "Patricia, my love..."

I smiled a very big smile! I fairly hoisted Reg up from the floor and embraced him tightly. "Yes! Yes, of course! You have made me the happiest woman on earth! I love you, now and forever. Let's tell Meg."

Reg grabbed the bell pull and tugged as vigorously as he could. In just seconds, it seemed, Meg rushed in.

"What? What's the emergency?"

"Meg, fetch the vicar. Ride in haste! Patricia and I are to be married immediately."

Meg smiled broadly. There were hugs all around. "I presume you're willing to wait until Jack returns from Folkestone?"

"Yes, we can manage that."

"Oh! But wait! The Reverend Pritchett must publish the banns of marriage three times before ye can be joined."



“‘Od Rabbit It! Meg, give that old psalm singer £1,000 and tell him to get his Most Reverend Arse into gear. Bring him back with you. We will marry in the parlor before dinner. If he wants, he can eat with us and drink whiskey. And we’ll talk about building him a new rectory.”

“Oh, my darling husband-to-be, I marvel at your understanding of religious procedure!”

And so our wedding took place. Reg wore his finest suit and I my brightest red satin dress. Reverend Pritchett officiated and Jack and Meg were witnesses. We ended the ceremony with a long, passionate kiss that made the good vicar blush.

After that, we repaired to the dining room for a fine wedding dinner. Sparkling wine from the Champagne region of France was served. Reverend Pritchett had the time of his life, Meg and Jack’s faces shone with pleasure, and Reg and I were very happy.

### **Wednesday, September 20, 1865**

Today, we walked the estate, from the barn and stable, past the forest, to the lake. We viewed the sheep in the meadow and even called upon Tom Brown, who was stationed on a hill above his flock.

I confided to my Reg that on June 27th, I had told Meg and Jack. “I swear that one day I’ll beat the good earl in a race across the estate,” but since we no longer had wheelchairs, that was quite impossible. With that, Sir Reg began *running* to the house. He won, and for that I blame my damned dress. *Next time, I’ll wear bloomers*, I assured myself.

### **Saturday, September 23, 1865**

Today we walked the Pent Stream in the direction of the bluffs. In short order, we were at the Mound of Venus. Sir Reg confirmed the legend that he had been conceived there. There, in the grove, in front of the statue, we did an historical re-enactment.