

The Storyteller

AN HOSPITAL INCIDENT

'What shall we do, Sister? The Father has come; there is no boy to serve him, and Sister Rita is sick. Is there no one to take her place?'

'Let me think. Ah, there is Doctor Randall!'

'Here, Sister Agnes; always near when you're about,' laughed a musically manly voice, and Doctor Randall stepped from an adjoining room and faced the two Sisters whose low words had reached his ears.

'That is right,' responded the aged Sister, whose sweet face showed little evidence of the many years spent in the service of the poor, the sick, and the ignorant. 'You can always be depended on. You see, Father is preparing for Mass and the Sister who serves him is ill. So, in the absence of a boy we are at a loss for a server. If you will be so kind, get ready, doctor, please, as there is little time to spare.'

It was not the first call for the doctor's services in such emergencies as this. He was the only Catholic physician on the staff as noted for his piety as for his remarkable cleverness and skill. Did a boy fail to make his appearance for Mass or Benediction, Doctor Randall, when not engaged in hospital work, was always ready to assume the duty of waiting upon the priest. He loved to do so, he had frequently asserted, because it reminded him of his childhood days, when far away in a home beyond the Rockies he had trudged weary miles to the little log mission, where, in the humblest of temples, he had assisted at the greatest of sacrifices.

The young doctor was at leisure this morning, so, Mass over, he re-entered the pretty chapel and for a long time remained absorbed in silent prayer. It was a beautiful spot—this tiny hospital chapel—with its marble altars and its handsome paintings and decorations. The young doctor's favorite image was one of the Blessed Virgin, for it represented her whose share in his affections were well known. In trials and difficulties the doctor sought consolation and assistance at Mary's feet. No day passed

at did not find him kneeling before her image praying fervently, and he was fond of attributing much of his success to her. 'Next to our Lord Himself the Blessed Mother is my best friend,' he was fond of saying, and the Sisters at least, knew well that he never took up an instrument to perform an operation without first invoking her aid.

To-day, if the doctor prayed even more earnestly than usual, it was because he was desirous of securing a certain favor. There was a vacancy in the hospital—that of resident physician—and the honor of succeeding to the position was being eagerly sought after by several of the young assistants. The choice seemed to stand between Doctor Randall and a certain Doctor Kennard, whose ability was undisputed, though he lacked the charm of manner and sympathetic tenderness which made the former popular with nurses and patients alike.

Doctor Kennard was the child of a rich man. Honors would not be so difficult for him to acquire as time went on. With Randall it was different. The only son of a poor widow, his college education had been scoured at the cost of great sacrifice on the mother's part and on that of a sister, whose savings from her salary as a teacher went far to defray 'brother Jack's' expenses. It meant much to him, this longed-for position. A term as resident physician in the renowned hospital of St. Ambrose would afford him an entree into the medical circles of the West, where he intended eventually to locate. So, day after day he knelt at our Lady's feet, asking her to 'adopt him as her child,' and to secure for him the favor he so ardently desired.

The doctor left the chapel to find a slight commotion in the corridor. Sister Agnes was flitting by him, but on seeing the young man, paused for a moment to whisper:

'An accident, Doctor. Come, right away. You will be needed.'

Doctor Randall followed promptly, keenly alive to the requirements of the occasion, for he was a surgeon to his finger-tips. Sister Agnes led the way to the operating room, where, on a stretcher, a shabbily dressed man was lying.

He was moaning in pain, having fallen down a cellar-way, and from the manner in which he moved one leg, it was believed that it was broken.

Doctor Randall made a thorough examination, found no injuries, save a few trifling bruises on the face and an abrasion of the skin on the right leg. He dressed these wounds and remarked to the students standing near:

'There are no bones broken, gentlemen; merely some slight scratches. The man is intoxicated. This is no place for him, and he is discharged.'

The man was removed from the hospital, and so far as Dr. Randall was concerned was forgotten. For only a short time, however. On the evening of the next day, as the young man entered the hospital, after an absence of a few hours, he was met by Sister Agnes, who, with a deeply-troubled countenance, addressed him:

'Come to my office, Doctor,' she said, in her soft, low voice, which, he now remarked, trembled with emotion. 'I have something very important to tell you.'

'Wonder what's up,' soliloquised the young man, as he followed her to the spot designated, and closed the door behind him.

'Doctor, something very strange has happened. Do you recall the man who was brought here yesterday, whom you discharged as having but little the matter? Well, whilst you were out this afternoon he was brought to us again, in much the same condition, and Doctor Kennard being in charge, made the examination. To the surprise of everyone, he pronounced the man to be suffering from a broken leg, and expressed himself in no complimentary terms regarding the doctor who had discharged him yesterday. Of course, all knew that you were the man, and the students, after watching the setting of the limb, withdrew into little groups to discuss the affair in whispers. I wished you to know this, Doctor, in order to prepare for any coolness that you may notice in the students' manners. I trust the matter may blow over, but it gives me no little uneasiness.'

The young man sat as if stunned. His face had paled during Sister Agnes' recital, and it was some time before he found his voice. He knew quite well what this meant to him—the slurs and innuendos of the college students, the loss of the coveted position as resident physician—in a word, a blight on his professional reputation, which would doubtless follow him through life.

'Sister,' he exclaimed huskily, 'I cannot understand it! I could have taken an oath that nothing ailed the man save intoxication, with the exception of a few bruises, which you remember I attended to. It is very strange, and I thank you for preparing me; but Sister,' he broke off suddenly, as she rose from her chair, 'tell me that you at least believe in me, and that you will not forsake me.'

It was never a difficult matter to touch Sister Agnes's heart. Now, with the boyish face looking down upon her with such a pleading glance, it fairly melted, and the tears rose into her mild blue eyes as she laid his hand kindly on his arm. 'Cheer up, my friend, all may yet be well. As for me, my confidence in you is unchanged. I am sure there is some sad mistake which may yet be remedied; but whether or not it be discovered, I am still your friend. Put all your faith in God, and do not be disheartened.'

A look of deepest gratitude rewarded Sister Agnes's loyal speech, and the doctor proceeded to the accident ward, where, on a spotless cot, lay the man who figured in this curious incident. The leg had been neatly banded and placed in splints, and had there been any doubt as to the man's identity, a survey of his rough, ill-kept beard and bloated face was ample proof that his patient of yesterday now lay before him.

It took but a few days to realise the young physician's gravest fears. He perceived a loss of caste in the averted faces of his fellow-doctors, in the open sneers of the medical students, and in the supercilious manner of many of the nurses, with whom he had hitherto been a favorite. The Sisters alone remained unchanged, Sister Agnes, in particular, openly and energetically championing his cause. Meanwhile the meeting of the Board, which would render a decision as to the new resident physician, was rapidly approaching, and there seemed little conjecture now as to the man destined to occupy the physician. Everything seemed to point to Doctor Kennard, who went about his accustomed tasks with an easy self-assurance, betraying more plainly than words the confidence he felt in his victory.

Had Jack Randall still hoped to secure the coveted position, his expectations would have been cruelly dashed to the ground by a conversation accidentally overheard one morning as the doctor was making his daily rounds. Two nurses in a neighboring room were talking in no low tones.

'Oh, don't tell me, Janet,' one said. 'There is not a grain of hope for Doctor Randall. At one time, yes, decidedly, but that was before the unfortunate affair over that man in the accident ward. Pity the doctor couldn't see that he had a broken leg; but then the students all say Doctor Randall passed the poor man because he was intoxicated. He hates liquor, you know. Well, he has ruined himself in this hospital, anyway, and perhaps for life, I fear.'

'Well, it's too bad,' rejoined another and gentler voice. 'I always liked Dr. Randall, and he is very popular with the Sisters.'

'Yes, but we all know the reason for that—Doctor Randall is a Catholic.'

'Oh, nonsense, that is not the only reason, Nettie—Dr. Randall is a gentleman.'