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King Padeen

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KING PADEEN.

"Why, matron, what a lovely child!"

I am the new "Probationer," and we are standing in a children's ward, the best part of a little, old-fashioned hospital full of queer corners, black beetles, and general inconvenience.

"Yes, that is Padeen, come over and speak to him, you will be great friends I am sure. Padeen, here is a new lady come to take care of you."

A pair of large hazel eyes scrutinize me gravely for a moment, then a tiny hand is extended, and Padeen remarks graciously:

"Gad to see ou, Miss A'dee, tum here," pointing to the seat beside him.

After a little, I am left to keep guard at that end of the ward with this parting injunction, "The children are not to get out of bed." "Get out of bed," I think, "of course not!" What a funny thing to tell me, and I sit by Padeen's cot contentedly rolling bandages, until a mischievous smile on his part and a titter behind makes me turn round, and I behold two little figures dancing on their beds, one playing fiddler, with a bandaged arm for fiddle, the other acting little dog.

A scream of laughter from the other children tells them that they are discovered, and as I hastily rise Padeen's voice is heard in tones of quiet command.

"Ou bad boys, tit down at once," and the culprits immediately slide in beneath their bed clothes.

Little blue-eyed Molly in the cot opposite had offended Padeen that morning, so I am presently treated to a confidential whisper. "Me punis Molly, ou see," and then gazing up at the ceiling he calmly, but decidedly, remarks, "Molly, ou Dotty," i.e., Doctor "is tum, tum, tum."

There is a dead silence; somehow when Padeen spoke the other children always stopped speaking; Molly sits up in her cot, flushed, eager.

"No, Padeen, no. It's ou Dotty is tum, tum, tum." But she is not allowed to finish; there is a general murmur amongst the other children. Padeen's little face flushes, he holds both little fists up in the air and repeats with emphasis,

"I say, Molly, ou Dotty is tum, tum, tum."

There is a general chorus of "Yes, Molly, Padeen says ou Dotty is tum, tum," and Molly, utterly subdued, falls back on her pillow weeping loudly, whilst Padeen turns to me with the satisfied air of one who has successfully crushed a rebellion.

"Molly punis'd."

I am mystified, what does it all mean, and crossing the ward to comfort Molly see matron smiling at me from the doorway.

"Padeen," she says softly, "poor Molly is crying."

"Is, she's punis'd."

"But poor Molly is sad; do you like her to be sad?"

The big hazel eyes grew larger still with unshed tears; he presses his tiny hands together and then calls out slowly,

"Molly—ou—Dotty's not tum, tum anny mo'." And Molly instantly sits up with a joyful smile.

"What does it all mean, matron? What is tum, tum, tum?"

"Indeed I cannot tell you," is her laughing reply. "I only know that there is grief and wailing when any of the children find their Doctor placed under the ban. It is a punishment of Padeen's own invention."

Fourteen little cots and a couple of wicker cradles form the sum of Padeen's court; always full of changing morsels of humanity, equally full of his devoted and obedient subjects.

How this babe of three years had attained to his sovereignty I do not know, but over us all, old and young, he reigned with the same despotic sway. He differed in one way only from the other children; they chatted and laughed with their home visitors, but when his mother came to see him, which she but seldom did, he lay silent holding her hand whilst

the large tears rolled slowly down his face, and after she left his long deep sobs seemed as though they must rend the frail little body in their effort to escape.

Ten months passed robbing Padeen in their flight of all his bright beauty. Yet it came with a shock to me when one day a visitor carelessly asked who is that peevish looking ugly child over there?

Our Padeen, ugly; peevish looking—Alas! my startled eyes were compelled to recognize the pitiful change; but for all that, he was still our little uncrowned king.

"Own true 'Ove" (Padeen's name for me, how invented we did not know), "Own true 'ove, tum cure 'tis de pain," he would say when awakened from fitful sleep by a sudden pang, and if I did not hear some eager little voice at once cried "Miss A'dee Padeen's calling."

How the children shouted with delight one day, when, the straps which held it down being removed for a moment, Padeen held the "well leg" straight up in the air and gazed at it, one of the old triumphant smiles flitting across his small thin face.

"See, see, Padeen can lift his leg."

There were changes in the hospital—matron left. I was sent on to work elsewhere, but I still had friends in the town, and this is part of a letter received from one of them:

"Do you remember Padeen? I've always forgotten to tell you that Kate went to the workhouse one day; passing along she saw a dirty-faced, skeleton sort of a child, gnawing away at an old crust. He looked so dreadful that she stopped and asked who he was. The old pauper woman in charge said that his father was dead, his mother had deserted him; someone had told her that he'd been sent from the Children's Hospital to the fever house, and from that on to her. 'A troublesome little brat that cried when she looked at him, and screamed if she touched him; so she never went next or near him now that she could help it.' Kate went over to the bed and found—can you credit it?—our Padeen. He did not know her at first, but when he did cried so that she was frightened. He was lying on a straw mattress, a dirty rag thrown over the sore leg.

"I went down the moment I heard of it, but did not go in, for they told me at the workhouse lodge that the old woman had found him dead when she brought his breakfast that morning. It was best for him, of course, but I cried myself ill at the thought of it all. Oh! how he must have suffered. How is it that we can sit at ease, we, women, when such things may be happening all around us, for aught we know, every day in the workhouses? Odd is it not, but now the thing that haunts me most is the recollection of those golden 'spun-silk' curls you loved so much."

That is all I can tell you about little Padeen; it is a true story, and seems to tell us of a wrong that ought to be put right, does it not?

D. VASA.

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