

# BETTY NEELS



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A GIRL  
NAMED ROSE

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Betty Neels

**A Girl Named Rose**

«HarperCollins»

## **Neels B.**

A Girl Named Rose / B. Neels — «HarperCollins», — (Mills & Boon M&B)

Mills & Boon presents the complete Betty Neels collection. Timeless tales of heart-warming romance by one of the world's best-loved romance authors. Through pure chance, Rose met Sybren Werdmer ter Sane, one of the most eminent surgeons in Holland. Their accidental encounter led to a job for Rose, nursing Sybren's godson. She loved everything about her new life – including Sybren! But surely such an important man wouldn't have time to take an interest in her. Yet what Rose didn't realise was that she had the gift of love, and it touched everyone around her – even hard-hearted surgeons.

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**“Dammit, there’s something I want to say to you—something I must explain before you go back to England,” he said quite angrily.**

“The trouble with you,” he continued, “is that I thought that I knew what you were thinking. Now that I’ve gotten to know you better I’m not sure anymore. I’m not even sure if you like me.”

Rose looked at him then and smiled a little and said steadily, “Oh, yes, I like you. I didn’t mean to, though.”

“Good, Rose. What would you say if I were to tell you that I want to get married?” He paused. “Do you know me well enough, I wonder?”

“Rose...” he began.

She held her breath, not sure what was going to happen next, aware her insides were turning over and wondering what he was going to say.

Only he didn’t say it; the telephone rang.

Romance readers around the world were sad to note the passing of Betty Neels in June 2001. Her career spanned thirty years, and she continued to write into her ninetieth year. To her millions of fans, Betty epitomized the romance writer, and yet she began writing almost by accident. She had retired from nursing, but her inquiring mind still sought stimulation. Her new career was born when she heard a lady in her local library bemoaning the lack of good romance novels. Betty’s first book, *Sister Peters in Amsterdam*, was published in 1969, and she eventually completed 134 books. Her novels offer a reassuring warmth that was very much a part of her own personality, and her spirit and genuine talent live on in all her stories.

# **A Girl Named Rose**

## **Betty Neels**



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## CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY summer sky, so vividly blue until now, was rapidly being swallowed up by black clouds, turning the water of the narrow canal to a steely grey and draining the colour from the old gabled houses on either side of it. The two girls on the narrow arched bridge spanning the water glanced up from the map they were studying and frowned at the darkening sky. The taller of the two had a pretty face, framed by dark curly hair, her blue eyes wide with apprehension; the smaller of the two, with unassuming features, straight pale brown hair piled into a too severe topknot and a pair of fine brown eyes, merely looked annoyed.

“It’s going to rain,” she observed, stating the obvious as the first slow, heavy drops began to fall. “Shall we go back if we can, go on, or find shelter?” She added in a matter-of-fact way, “I haven’t the faintest idea where we are.” She began to fold the map, already wet, but before she had done so the rain came down in earnest, soaking them in moments. Worse, there was a sudden flash of lightning and a great rumble of thunder.

The pretty girl gave a scared yelp. “Rose, what shall we do? I’m soaked.”

Her companion took her arm and hurried her off the bridge. “I’ll knock on a door,” she said, “perhaps there’s a porch...”

The brick road they were on was narrow and the houses lining it were solid seventeenth and eighteenth century town mansions built by wealthy Dutch merchants, their doors massive, their windows symmetrical, presenting an ageless calm in this backwater of Amsterdam, and not one of them had a porch. A second flash of lightning sent the smaller girl up the steps of the nearest house, to bang resoundingly on the great brass door knocker.

“You can’t,” objected her companion; she didn’t answer, only knocked again.

The door opened and she found herself staring into an elderly bewhiskered face; it belonged to a stout man, almost bald except for a fringe of hair with a stern expression and pale blue eyes. She swallowed and drew a breath.

“Please may we stand in your doorway?” she began. “We’re wet and lost.”

Before the man could answer a door behind him opened and shut and a voice asked, “English, and lost?” and said something in Dutch so that the man opened the door wider and stood aside for them to go in.

The hall they entered was very impressive; its black-and-white tiled floor partly covered with thin silky rugs, its white plastered walls hung with paintings in heavy frames; the man who stood in its centre was impressive too, well over six feet tall, with great shoulders and the good looks to turn any girl’s head. Any age between thirty and forty, Rose guessed, wondering if his fair hair was actually silver.

She hung back a little; this was the kind of situation Sadie could cope with admirably; her pretty face and charming smile had smoothed her path through three years of training at the children’s hospital where they both worked; they could certainly turn things to her own advantage now.

“Come in, come in.” The blue eyes studied them sleepily. “Very wet, aren’t you? Give your cardigans to Hans, he’ll get them dried for you and come into the sitting-room while I explain where you are.”

He smiled at them both, but his eyes lingered on Sadie’s glowing face, damp with rain, her curls no less attractive for being wet, whereas Rose’s hair hung in damp tendrils, doing nothing to aid her looks.

He held out a large hand and shook their proffered ones firmly. “Sybren Werdmer ter Sane,” he said briskly. It was Sadie who answered him. “I’m Sadie Gordon and this is Rose Comely.” She smiled bewitchingly at him as he opened a big double door and ushered them into the room beyond.

It was a large lofty apartment, its ceiling was plaster with pendant bosses, and a central recessed oval with a border of fruit and flowers. The windows were large and draped with heavy swathes of plum-coloured velvet, and the same rich colour predominated in the needlework carpets strewn on the polished wood floor. The furniture was a thoughtful mixture of the old and the new. Vast display cupboards flanked the steel fireplace with its rococo chimney-piece and mirror, a pair of magnificent seventeenth-century armchairs, elaborately carved and velvet-cushioned, stood on either side of a small table inlaid with mother-of-pearl. A pair of William and Mary winged settees were on either side of the fireplace and there were a number of lamp tables and small comfortable easy chairs.

A delightful room, Rose thought, but Sadie said at once, “I say, what a simply heavenly room—you’d never guess from the outside...”

“Er—no, I suppose not. Do sit down; I’ve asked Hans to bring you some tea and in the meantime tell me how I can help you.”

“Oh, Rose will explain; we’re hopelessly lost—my fault, I wouldn’t stop to look at the map.”

“Where are you staying?”

Rose answered him in her quiet sensible voice. “At a small hotel called ‘De Zwaan’, it’s close to the Amstel Hotel, down a narrow side street. We got here yesterday, quite late in the evening, and we’re leaving again in the morning. We’re on a package tour; six of us, but the other four didn’t want to explore. We were all right to start with, but these small streets are all alike, aren’t they? Besides, they are so picturesque we just walked on and on...”

“It is so very easy to get lost!” commented their host. “But you aren’t too far out of your way. Will your friends worry?”

“They went shopping and they won’t be back at the hotel until the shops close. We have a kind of high tea at half past six.”

“Ah yes, of course,” murmured Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane; he had never eaten high tea in his life and indeed was a little vague as to what it was, but there was no need for him to comment further for Sadie, who had been frankly staring around her, wanted to know if the large painting of a family group wearing the stiff clothes of a couple of hundred years earlier were any relation to him. He led her over to take a closer look and when Hans came in a few minutes later with the tea tray, paused only long enough to ask Rose to pour out. “What is it you say in England? ‘Be Mother’.”

She poured the tea from a silver teapot into paperthin china cups, reflecting that no one had ever called her motherly before; homely, plump, dull, uninteresting—all these, repeated so often that they no longer hurt; indeed anything her stepmother said to her now had no effect at all, and even though she was aware that there was truth in what she said, she enjoyed the friendship of a large number of people who didn’t seem to notice her unassuming looks. The others sat down presently and she handed cups and as she did so admired her host’s good manners, and when he turned to her and asked her what she thought of Holland, she answered him unselfconsciously in her pleasant voice. After a few moments she noticed that he was asking apparently casual questions, all of which she answered with polite vagueness, completely wasted from her point of view for Sadie broke in to give him chapter and verse about St Bride’s, with a wealth of unnecessary detail about their training and how they had passed their exams not six months previously and now held Staff Nurses’ posts. “Rose is the gold medallist,” she informed him, “she’s the only one of us with any brains; anyway she studied and we didn’t. There were always other things to do in the evenings when we were off duty.” She added ingenuously, “You know, housemen and the senior medical students.”

Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane’s blue eyes rested fleetingly on Rose’s face; what he saw there caused him to say kindly, “I imagine that a gold medal is worth at least half a dozen housemen, your family must be very proud of you.”

This tactful remark didn’t have the effect he expected; Rose’s face flooded with colour and then went pale and she mumbled something, luckily lost in Sadie’s chatter. “That’s why we’re here,”

she explained, “we’ve been saving up for months to have a holiday—to celebrate, you know. Only a week.” She sighed dramatically. “Back to work in two days’ time.”

She turned blue eyes to him. “You speak perfect English. Have you been in England?”

His voice was smooth. “Yes, from time to time. We are, of course, taught it in school; Dutch is a difficult language so we need to be proficient in the more widely used tongues.”

“You sound like a professor,” declared Sadie.

“Oh, I do hope not. Now shall I explain your street map to you?”

A nicely worded hint that they should think of leaving; Rose got to her feet at once and followed him to the table between the windows and handed him her map, and he took a pen from his pocket, marked a cross on it and then inked in their return route. “So that you will know exactly where you had got to,” he pointed out, “but I hope you will allow me to drive you back to your hotel—there’s always the chance that you will get lost again.” He handed Rose the map and tugged an embroidered bell-rope by the fireplace and when Hans came, spoke to him in his own language.

Hans came back almost at once with their cardigans and their host said easily, “It’s a bare ten minutes drive; Hans will fetch the car round.”

He helped Sadie into her cardigan and answered her light-hearted chatter good naturedly and then turned to Rose. But she was already buttoned neatly into hers, standing quietly with the map in her hand.

“We are very grateful,” she told him gravely. “It’s quite frightening, being lost—and then the storm...but there’s no need for you to drive us back, now we know how to follow the map we can walk quite easily.”

“I am sure that you could, you seem to be, if you will forgive me for saying so, a very practical young lady, but I should prefer to take you back; besides I have enjoyed the company of both of you—the gratitude should be mine for helping me to pass a dull afternoon in my own company.”

Oh, very polished, thought Rose, even if he doesn’t mean a word of it.

They went out into the hall and before Hans opened the front door, she had time to have another quick look round. The staircase was at the back of the hall, thickly carpeted, with barley sugar balusters, curving up gracefully to the floor above; there was a massive chandelier above their heads and a great carved oak table against one wall. It was tantalising to have a glimpse of such a fine house before they were out on the narrow pavement and being ushered into the dignified dark grey Rolls-Royce motor car standing there.

Sadie slid into the front seat, exclaiming prettily that it had always been her ambition to travel in a Rolls, and Rose got into the back, quite content to do so, only half listening to her friend rattling on about one thing and another while she looked out of the window, trying to see both sides at once; she wasn’t likely to come to Amsterdam again for some time, indeed if ever, and she wanted to see as much as could be crowded into their brief stay.

At their hotel they bade their host goodbye, thanked him once more, and Sadie said, “I hope you come to London and we see you again; don’t forget where we are—St Bride’s.” She gave him a beguiling smile as they shook hands. “I think you’d be much more fun to go out with than any of the housemen I know!”

He made some laughing reply and opened the hotel door for them.

Inside Rose said doubtfully, “Sadie, weren’t you a bit—you know...? After all he is a complete stranger...”

Sadie laughed. “Look who is talking—who knocked on his door, then?”

“Well, we had to get in out of the rain and I didn’t know he was living there, did I?” They began to climb the steep stairs to their rooms on the top floor. “The others will be back and I’m famished.”

The rest of the party were milling around the small, plainly furnished rooms gossiping about their day. As Rose and Sadie reached the top landing they surged out of doors, full of questions.

“Where have you been?” demanded a lanky girl with a long face. “We’ve been getting worried; after all, Rose, you’ve got all the plans for tomorrow and the money for the hotel...”

Rose began mildly and was cut short by Sadie’s exuberant voice. “We walked miles and got lost and then there was that awful storm so Rose knocked on the door of a simply huge house and we had tea there and came back in a Rolls-Royce.”

The lanky girl goggled at her. “You’re making it up.”

“It’s quite true,” said Rose composedly. “We did get lost, Alice. Did you have a good time shopping?”

“I’ll say,” a girl with red hair interpolated, “a good thing you’ve got the money to pay the bill here, Rose, I’m skint.”

“I’ll pay this evening, we don’t leave until after lunch, so if there’s any money over we’ll share it out.”

The little group dispersed to tidy for the evening and Rose went into her own room and changed her damp dress for a cotton jersey and did her hair again. Which done she made up her face and then stood peering into the very small looking-glass which hung on the wall. She was undoubtedly a plain girl; not, she conceded, hopelessly so, her skin was good, she had nice eyebrows and her eyes were passable, only her nose was too short and turned up very slightly and her mouth was too wide, and as for her hair...fine and silky reaching to her waist but most uninterestingly pale brown. She pinned it severely to the top of her head and went to join the others. There was no point in her being sorry for herself and indeed she seldom was, but today it had struck her forcibly that no man, certainly not one as handsome as Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane, would bother to look at her twice. Not that he had ignored her; his manners had been beautiful but she thought that they would have been just as beautiful if she had been an elderly aunt or a chance acquaintance he wasn’t likely to see again.

They trooped down to their high tea and joined the other members of the coach party in the basement dining-room; they were mostly elderly couples with a sprinkling of middle-aged ladies on their own who treated the six of them with a guarded friendliness and greeted them now with looks of mild reproof.

“We spent a delightful afternoon doing the canal trip,” one of the single middle-aged ladies told them. “It’s something you shouldn’t have missed. Most instructive.” She began to enumerate the various sights they had seen, and they, making formidable inroads into the cold meat and ham on the table, murmured and muttered in reply.

“And what did you do?” asked a cosy matron kindly.

“Went to the shops—they are super.” Alice took another slice of bread and buttered it lavishly. “But Rose and Sadie went for a walk and got caught in the storm. They came back in a Rolls-Royce...”

Sadie looked daggers at her but Rose answered composedly enough, “Yes, we were lucky enough to be offered shelter by someone who kindly drove us back here.”

“But you didn’t know him?” one of the single ladies, a wispy faded blonde, asked with faint excitement.

“Not then, we didn’t,” explained Rose in her sensible way, “but we do now. We were lost you see and had to take shelter.”

An old man with glasses pronounced it his opinion, that foreign parts, while interesting, were unreliable. A remark which closed the conversation for the simple reason that it was difficult to answer.

They weren’t to leave until directly after lunch on the following day and since there was enough money over after Rose had paid their bill, the six of them voted to take a trip along the city’s canals. They prudently packed their bags before going to their beds; there would be ample time in the morning for sight-seeing, but much as they had enjoyed their brief stay they had no wish to be left behind with almost no money in their pockets.

They got themselves up early, had the coffee and rolls and cheese the hotel provided and made a brisk beeline for the Central Station from which the boats left.

There weren't too many people about at nine o'clock in the morning; they got on to one of the first boats to leave and settled down to enjoy themselves.

It was a splendid morning and the old houses, viewed from the water, looked at their very best. They viewed the smallest house in the city, the Munt, and the patrician houses lining the canals, with suitable interest while the guide, switching from English to German to French with enviable ease, pointed out the highlights of the trip. They were back again soon after ten o'clock and trooped down Damrak to the Dam Square, intent on coffee before they went back to the hotel. They were waiting to cross the square, thick with traffic and noisy little trams when Sadie caught Rose by the arm.

"Look," she cried loudly. "There he is, over there..."

Too far away for him to see them, Rose judged, watching the Rolls slide between two trams with Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane at the wheel. Besides, what would be the point, even if he did? They weren't going to meet again.

They lunched at the hotel, cheese rolls and coffee because the hotel didn't cater for cooked meals at midday, and then they boarded their coach. Rose felt a twinge of regret as they were driven through the city's heart and its suburbs; streets of neat houses and flats, all exactly alike and not in the least resembling the lovely old houses in the centre of the city. At least she had investigated the inside of one of them, and very nice it was too. She allowed her thoughts to dwell on the pleasures of living in such a house, lapped around with comfort, no, not comfort, luxury. She said out loud, "I wonder if he was married?"

Sadie, sitting beside her, chuckled. "Well, of course he would be—I daresay he had a handful of children too, on the top floor with Nanny."

Rose was surprised to find that the idea quite upset her.

The coach kept to the motorway, giving her little time to do more than glimpse the villages to be seen on either side of it. "Next time I come, if I ever do," she told Sadie, "I shan't go on a single motorway; I'm sure there is heaps to see."

"Well, I don't suppose you'll come again," said Sadie comfortably; she sounded faintly smug; more or less engaged to a solid young man with his feet firmly on the first rung of banking, her own future was already cut out for her. She added, "I mean, you are sure to get offered a sister's post—there's Sister Coutts on children's medical due to retire, and the junior night sister leaving to get married at Christmas."

Rose resolutely brushed away the vague daydreams floating around inside her head. She didn't much care for medical nursing and nor did she like night duty; she would like to work on the children's surgical ward, but chance was a fine thing; the ward sister there was young enough to be there for another twenty years, and certainly had no intention of marrying. Rose consoled herself with the thought that she might be going there as a staff nurse. Perhaps when she had more experience she would look for a sister's post at another hospital, as far away from her home as possible. Not that it was home any more. Even after two years it hurt to think of her father; they had lived so happily together after her mother died until quite out of the blue, just after she had started training, he had told her that he was going to marry again.

Her stepmother was still quite young, a well preserved forty, with a pretty face and a charm which she lavished on Rose when there was anyone there to see it. They had disliked each other on sight, but Rose had done her best to understand her father's remarriage and had tried hard to like her stepmother. It wasn't until her father died suddenly and her stepmother married again within six months of his death, that Rose admitted to herself that she didn't like her and never would. She couldn't stand Mr Fletcher, a tall thin man, who doted on her stepmother but treated Rose with cold severity. It was like having two strangers in her home and during the following year she had gradually stopped spending her days off and holidays there, feeling an interloper each time she went to the

village near Tunbridge Wells. Instead she had answered her mother's elder sister's invitation to visit her and now she felt more at home there in Northamptonshire. Her aunt lived at Ashby St Ledgers, in a comfortable little house, a rather sterner version of Rose's mother, but kind and affectionate and ready to welcome her niece. She was an enthusiastic gardener, a staunch supporter of the church and had a finger in every village pie and was looked after by a little dumpling of a woman Rose remembered from her childhood when she had been taken on a visit to Aunt Millicent. Both ladies, in their way, made much of her, her aunt in an off-hand manner which didn't quite conceal her very real affection, and Maggie with a cosy warmth made apparent by the nourishing meals she dished up and the hot milk she insisted Rose should take to bed each night.

"I'd like to see more flesh on your bones," she would mutter, pressing the nourishing drink into Rose's hands when she went to bed, and each time Rose went to stay, she would return with a large cake in her case; devoured with gratitude by Rose and her friends the moment it was unpacked.

She thought of her aunt now; she would be going to see her in a few weeks' time but first she would have to settle down on whichever ward she was sent to. Hopefully back on children's surgical, she had been there for three months as a student nurse and loved it. She turned to say something to Sadie but that young lady was asleep, her pretty mouth slightly open, her curls, rather untidy now, framing her charming face. No wonder the Dutchman had been so taken with her, thought Rose, quite without envy.

The bus stopped just before they reached Zeebrugge and they all got out and had tea and a biscuit; the tea—a teabag in a saucer with a glass of almost boiling water, and no milk, was refreshing but not at all like the dark strong brew they shared in each other's rooms when they came off duty. They were off again within fifteen minutes and shortly after went on board, where they left everything in the bus and climbed the stairs to the upper decks. They knew the journey would take four hours and there was still the drive to London from Dover; they wouldn't be at the hospital until midnight at least. Luckily none of them were on duty until one o'clock the next day. Their main thoughts were now centred on food. Lunch had been light and hours ago; Rose counted what was left of the money and then shared it out between the six of them. There wasn't a great deal, not enough to go to the restaurant with the other travellers in the coach, but there was a cafeteria on board. They trooped along its counter, getting value for their money, spending it on rolls and butter, cheese, hardboiled eggs and cups of tea.

It had been great, they all agreed, sitting round a table, munching, for the most part the food had been good and generous; they had seen a lot and their fellow passengers had been friendly.

"But next time I go," declared Sadie, "I'll travel by car and eat all the time at those heavenly restaurants we saw and never went into. I'd like to spend at least a week in Amsterdam, wouldn't you, Rose?"

Rose drank the last of her tea. "Oh, yes—but I'd like to see a lot more of Holland too. But Amsterdam was smashing."

Alice said slyly: "I bet you'd like to meet that Dutchman again..."

"Yes I would." Rose spoke readily enough in her composed way. "One meets someone and wonders about them and that's as far as it goes. Shall we go on deck for a bit? We'll have to sit in that coach presently."

It was most fortunate that the coach went within a hundred yards of St Bride's and the driver, being a kind man, took them almost to the door. They tumbled out, exchanging goodbyes with the other passengers, collected their cases, thanked the driver, handed him the tip Rose had been jealously guarding, and hurried across the street from the hospital to the Nurses' home. The warden on duty let them in with a good deal of shushing and requests to be quiet, and rather dampened in spirits, they went softly up the stairs to the second floor where the staff nurses had their rooms. They did not linger over getting ready for bed; there was a brisk to-ing and fro-ing in competition for baths, quick good nights and then sleep. Rose, laying her head in a cloud of soft brown hair on her pillow,

spared a thought for the Dutchman and then resolutely shut him out of her mind. The last few years had taught her to make the best of things and try to improve on them if possible, and never, never, to waste time on wanting something she couldn't have: to see him again. She closed her eyes and slept.

There wasn't much leisure in the morning; they got up for breakfast for the simple reason that if they didn't they would be hungry, but it was a cheerful rather noisy meal, for everyone wanted to know about their trip. Besides there was the hospital gossip to catch up on, and once they were back in their rooms, there was the unpacking to do, clean caps to make up and another pot of tea, made in their own little pantry, and by then it was time to go to the office, one by one, to be told where they were to go on duty.

There were no surprises for Rose; staff nurse on children's surgical and she was to report to Sister Cummins at one o'clock. As an afterthought she was asked if she had enjoyed her holiday, to which she made a suitable reply before getting herself tidily out of her superior's presence.

Sister Cummins seemed pleased to see her; she was a big, vigorous young woman, quite wrapped up in her work and a splendid nurse. She had no use for nurses who weren't prepared to work as hard as she did, and made a point of saying so, so that she wasn't popular, but Rose got on well with her, going calmly about her work and refusing to take umbrage at some of Sister Cummins' more caustic remarks. And as for the children, they got on splendidly together; she settled down quickly into the chaotic routine of the ward, and if, just now and again, her thoughts turned to the lovely old house and its handsome owner in Amsterdam, she shook them off briskly.

The ward was very busy, for the hospital did a good deal of major surgery in the paediatric wing; very small patients with heart conditions, cystic hygroma which had become infected and needed surgical treatment, pyloric stenosis, club feet, hydrocephalus. Rose, trotting quietly to and fro between the cots, had her heart wrung a dozen times a day and yet her days had their lighter moments too. The convalescent children, full of good spirits, were as naughty as she could wish and Sister Cummins, once they were on the road to recovery, didn't believe in checking them more than was necessary. There was a play-room where they were taken each day under the care of two of the nurses and they screamed and shouted and played together and more often than not, fell asleep. Rose never had much time to spend in the play-room, there were so many ill children to nurse, but it pleased her to hear the normal racket even if it did give her a headache by the end of a busy day.

She was to have a long weekend in a week's time; the two weeks she had already done on the ward had flown and although she had had days off she hadn't gone away. She hadn't heard from her stepmother but she hadn't expected to, she sensed that she wouldn't be welcome if she went to her home. Besides, there was nothing for her there any more. It would be nice to see Aunt Millicent and Maggie again; she would help in the garden and take her aunt's old dog, Shep, for gentle walks and eat huge meals.

It had been more than a full day; three operations and a street accident. Rose, going off duty over an hour late, looked as tired as she felt. A long hot bath, and never mind supper, she decided, she could make tea for herself and there were some biscuits in the tin and perhaps if one of her friends felt like it she would nip down the street to the fish and chip shop and get a bag of chips.

Head well down, she ran down the wide stone staircase leading to the front hall; there wasn't anyone about; those who had an evening off had gone long ago, those on duty were busy seeing to suppers, hurrying to be ready in time for the visitors in half an hour. She jumped the last two steps and ran full tilt into the man standing at the foot of the stairs.

She had butted him in the waistcoat and her head shot up. Not, for heaven's sake, one of the consultants. It wasn't, it was the Dutchman, quite unshaken, smiling down at her.

"Well, well," he said pleasantly, "Nurse Comely, literally bumping into me."

She blushed, hating herself for doing so, unaware that the colour in her cheeks made her almost pretty. She said nervously: "Oh, hullo, Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane. What a surprise. Have you come to visit someone?"

He was smiling a little. “Yes, are you going off duty?”

It was silly of her heart to leap so violently, and even sillier that she had thought even for a split second that he was going to ask her to spend the evening with him. She must be mad. She said soberly, “Yes, I am. Very late. We’re busy today.” She added succinctly: “Children, you know.”

“Ah, yes.” He stood for a moment, not speaking, and she saw that he wanted to go but didn’t want to be too abrupt about it.

“Well, I must hurry,” she told him brightly. “I’m supposed to be going out.” She held out a hand. “It was nice to see you again, goodbye.”

He shook her hand gently and said just as gently, “Indeed, a pleasant surprise for me, too, Nurse.”

She gave him a quick smile and crossed the hall very fast and went out of the door to cross the road to the nurses’ home. Now if she had been Sadie she would have managed better; turned on the charm, made some amusing remarks...only she wasn’t Sadie. She went to her room and not allowing herself to brood, undressed, lay in the bath until impatient thumps on the door got her out of it, drank her tea in the company of such of her friends as were off duty too, and went to bed early, pleading a headache.

She wasn’t allowed peace and quiet for long. Sadie, coming off duty a couple of hours later, burst into her room with an excited, “Rose, Rose, wake up, do. He’s here—our Dutchman, I’ve just met him in the hall and guess what, he’s a surgeon and knows old Cresswell—” Mr Cresswell was the senior consultant at the hospital, an elderly grumpy man who somehow became a magician once he had a scalpel in his hand “—I asked him why he was here.”

“You didn’t,” expostulated Rose in horror.

“I did. Why not? And he said I’d know soon enough. What do you suppose he wants?”

Rose sat up in bed and hugged her knees. “Sadie, I don’t know. Probably to consult with someone, or give a lecture or borrow something.”

“He remembered me,” said Sadie, ignoring this remark. “He said, ‘Ah, my charming visitor.’ He told me he was delighted to see me again. I hope he’s here in the morning. He might ask us out to lunch or a drink or something.”

Rose eyed her friend soberly. “You perhaps, not me, and anyway, it might not be quite the thing; he’s much more likely to have lunch with old Cresswell and the other consultants.”

Sadie grinned at her. “The trouble with you, Rosie, is that you have no romance in you, not one ounce.”

Rose curled up in bed. “Well, let me know what happens. We’ll both be at first dinner tomorrow.”

It was half way through the morning when Sister Cummins came down the ward to where she was bending over one of the cots, adjusting an intravenous drip. “Staff, will you go to the office? Now. Miss Timms wants to see you.”

“Me, heavens, whatever have I done?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. I’ll take over here. Leave your apron in my office and tidy your hair.”

Two minutes later Rose, hair smoothed beneath her muslin cap, went as fast as she dared without actually running through the labyrinth of passages to the centre of the hospital where Miss Timms had her office, tucked away behind an outer office, guarded by her two assistants. There was another door to her office too, opening directly on to the passage Rose was racing along. As she reached it she skidded to a halt. Miss Timms had a loud voice. “I’m sorry that I must disappoint you, Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane, Nurse Gordon is a very good nurse and I agree with you that she has a pleasant manner, but she isn’t very skilled in the nursing of children and toddlers. Now Nurse Comely is our gold medallist and is at present staffing on the acute children’s ward; she has already spent some months there during her training and is absolutely trustworthy and highly skilled.”

Rose was standing like a statue; quite forgetful that it was a most reprehensible thing to eavesdrop; moreover, listeners never heard good of themselves, a fact borne out by the Dutchman's remark. His voice wasn't as loud as Miss Timms', but it was deep and very clear; she didn't miss a syllable.

"Then I must bow to your good advice," he was saying. "I am sure that if you recommend her so highly, Nurse Comely will suit the case very well. But it seemed to me that she lacks a certain light-heartedness—she is a very quiet girl, is she not?"

Miss Timms didn't answer at once, and Rose held her breath and beat down her sudden rage. Quiet was she, lacking in light-heartedness, was she? Why didn't he go all the way and say that she was plain?

"Not a girl that one would notice," pursued Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane blandly, "but of course she will spend a good deal of time with her patient. You see, Miss Timms, I had hoped for someone who would be able to cheer up the child's mother—distract her thoughts and so on, and it seemed to me that Miss Gordon filled the bill."

Rose ground her splendid little teeth and let out a breath as he went on, "But I bow to your wisdom—if I might have a few words with her?"

"She should be here by now." Miss Timms' voice held a faint triumph at getting her own way. It also sent Rose soft-footed past the door, to tap on the outer office and be admitted, to be urged into Miss Timms' office without more ado.

After living for several years with her stepmother, she had learnt to hide her feelings. She was slightly pale and she was breathing rather fast but that could be put down to her sudden summons. She said politely, "Good morning, Miss Timms, you wanted to see me?" and then, "Good morning, Sir," in a colourless voice. Her glance was so quick that she didn't see his sudden sharp look which was perhaps a good thing.

## CHAPTER TWO

MISS TIMMS SAID, “Ah, Staff Nurse Comely,” in a voice which suggested that she was about to pronounce judgment on Rose’s head. “I must explain why I have sent for you.”

Rose sat, inwardly seething. She looked the picture of composure with her pretty hands folded tidily on her lap and her dark eyes upon Miss Timms’ face. Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane sat down too, to one side and a little behind her, very relaxed in his chair although he was watching her from under hooded lids. He still watched her as Miss Timms began to speak in her most impressive voice.

“Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane is a surgeon, a friend and colleague of Mr Cresswell and he has come to me with a request which Mr Cresswell begs me to grant.” She paused, inflated her massive bosom with a deep, dramatic breath, then went on. “Doctor ter Brandt, who lives in The Hague, is a friend of both Mr Cresswell and Mijnheer Werdmer ter Sane. He is married to an Englishwoman, a trained nurse from St Athud’s, they have a two-year-old son and Mrs...” she glanced at the man sitting quietly listening and said coyly, “I suppose one calls her Mevrouw?”

“It would be quite suitable if you were to refer to her as Mrs, indeed I would suggest that you address me as Mister.”

Miss Timms bowed her head in majestic acknowledgement. “Thank you. As I was saying, Mrs ter Brandt is expecting her second child within a few weeks and is therefore unable to deal with the painful situation which has arisen.” She paused again and if her listeners were impatient they gave no sign.

“Two days ago the little boy fell and before his mother could pick him up, had rolled down stone steps leading to the garden. He has sustained a depressed fractured skull and is in the children’s hospital in Amsterdam where Mr Werdmer ter Sane is a consultant. His mother is most anxious that he should have an English nurse since she is unable to do much for him herself. Mr Werdmer ter Sane got in touch with Mr Cresswell who kindly suggested that a nurse from St Bride’s might be borrowed. I have recommended you for the case, Staff Nurse, you will leave this afternoon. That will be all.”

Not quite all, however. Mr Werdmer ter Sane got to his feet and observed blandly, “Perhaps I might ask Nurse Comely if she will accept. She may not wish to take the case although I hope that she will.”

She looked at him then. “Yes, of course, I’ll come,” she told him without fuss. She added silently, even though I’m quiet and not light-hearted and not pretty either. She added out loud this time, “If you are sure that there isn’t a nurse who would suit you better?”

His eyes were suddenly intent on hers. He said smoothly, “If Miss Timms recommends you so highly, I feel sure that the matter is entirely satisfactory. Would you be able to leave at three o’clock this afternoon? We can go by hovercraft from Dover and be in Amsterdam late this evening.”

He glanced at Miss Timms. “That could be arranged, Miss Timms?”

“Certainly, Staff Nurse may go off duty now and pack what she will need.” She nodded at Rose. “Very well, Staff Nurse, you may go. Have you enough money to tide you over?”

“No,” said Rose baldly. “Payday is next week.”

“As I am aware. Come to the outer office in an hour’s time and you will receive an advance in cash.”

“Thank you, Miss Timms.” Rose turned to the door and found it being opened for her; her thanks were wooden.

It was well past eleven o’clock; she sped back to the ward, gave Sister Cummins a brief resumé of her interview, listened with sympathy to that lady’s opinion of foreigners who came borrowing the best nurses in the hospital without so much as a by-your-leave and was bidden to have her coffee before she left the ward. “I’ll have mine too,” said Sister Cummins gloomily, “and just whisk through

the routine—how far had you got? I suppose I'll be sent some feather-brained idiot... I could strangle that man."

She thumped the coffee-pot down on her desk as there was a tap on the door and called "come in" in a grudging voice.

Mr Werdmer ter Sane came in, completely at ease. "Sister Cummins? I've come to apologise for taking your staff nurse away. Believe me, only the urgency of the situation drives me to such a drastic step." He shot a glance at Rose's calm face. "I dare say Nurse Comely has already explained to you..."

Sister Cummins' wrath was oozing away under his charm. "Well, it is most inconvenient but I can see that it is urgent." She waved him to the padded office chair in a corner that no one ever had time to sit in. "Have some coffee while you tell me about it..."

Rose fetched another mug and poured the coffee as he eased himself into the chair and began his explanations; much more succinctly than Miss Timms had done and in half the time. He drank his coffee with every sign of enjoyment too, although by now it was lukewarm and tasted frightful. "And if I might take up a few more minutes of your time? It would be useful to explain to Nurse Comely what she should bring with her."

He glanced across at Rose; he looked kind and impersonal. "Your passport, money, uniform, for you will be at the hospital for some time, I imagine, and whatever you wear out of uniform. Enough for three or four weeks, but I'm sure that if you forget anything Christina ter Brandt will see to it."

He got up and smiled charmingly at Sister Cummins who smiled back, quite won over. When he had gone she turned to Rose, collecting mugs and putting them on the tray. "You know, I quite envy you—he is really rather nice. We could do with a few like him in this place." As Rose reached the door, she added, "You'd better get cracking, you don't want to keep him waiting." Just for a moment she looked wistful. "I wouldn't mind being in your shoes. Bye."

Rose balanced the tray, kicked the door open with one foot and said, "I hope I'll come back here, Sister. I'm happy on this ward. I don't suppose I'll be gone for more than a few weeks at the outside."

She had half an hour before her dinner time; she went to her room, got her case from the depths of the wardrobe and started to pack. Uniform and caps, tights and undies, dressing-gown and slippers and a cotton skirt and a handful of tops as well as a plain linen dress, sandals, make-up and a sponge bag and her rain coat. It was time by then to go to the office and collect her money; most of her month's salary so at least she wouldn't be penniless. She put the envelope in her pocket and went along to the canteen, collected her shepherd's pie, potatoes and beans, and bore her plate to the table where her friends were already sitting.

Sadie greeted her excitedly. "I say, Rosie, I saw him again coming out of the office—he seemed in a hurry, but he waved. I wonder why he's here."

Rose speared some pie and added mustard. "Well," she said slowly, "he's here to borrow a nurse—a friend of his with an English wife; their small son has got a fractured skull, I don't know any details, I suppose I'll get those later..."

"Later? What on earth do you mean?" She had the attention of the whole table now.

"He's borrowed me. Mind you, he didn't want me particularly, only Miss Timms seemed to think I'd do. It's for a week or two and I'm going at three o'clock this afternoon. Back to Amsterdam."

"Rose, how absolutely marvellous. And you'll see him every day."

"I don't know about that, Sadie, I'm going to look after a toddler, not accompany Mr Werdmer ter Sane to nightclubs."

There was a little burst of laughter and then a spate of questions between gobbling their dinners with one eye on the clock. Milk pudding and strong tea brought their meal to an end and they got up to go back on duty. Only Sadie lingered. "Have fun, Rose, I wish it was me..."

Rose smiled at her friend. "I'm sure he wishes it was you, too, love. But Miss Timms didn't give him a chance."

Sadie brightened. “Keep reminding him about me,” she urged. “I know I’m going to marry and settle down but I wouldn’t mind one final fling.”

Rose finished her packing, showered and got into a cotton jersey shirtwaister; not high fashion, but very simple and suitable for a journey, then she went to phone her aunt.

Aunt Millicent took the news calmly, merely hoping that her little patient would make a good recovery and voicing the opinion that travel broadened the mind and would Rose be sure and keep her money in a safe place. “And let me know how you get on, my dear,” she finished. “We shall both be glad to hear from you; here’s Maggie.”

Maggie disliked the telephone; her voice, faintly apprehensive, came over the wire hesitantly. “Take care now,” she begged Rose, “and don’t eat too much of that nasty foreign food. Come back soon, love.”

Rose put the receiver back; they were dears, the pair of them, the moment she got back when she had days off she’d go and see them. She pondered the problem of ringing her stepmother and decided against it. There was little point in it, neither she nor her new husband took any interest in her, nor she in them.

It was getting on for three o’clock; she went along to the pantry and made herself a pot of tea and sat drinking it, checking over in her mind that she had everything she might need with her. She tidied the tea things away, went to her room and collected her case and shoulder bag and crossed the street to the hospital. She was early but the Rolls was there in the forecourt with Mr Werdmer ter Sane at the wheel. As soon as he saw her he came to meet her, took her case and put it in the boot and ushered her into the front seat.

“I don’t intend to stop on the way,” he informed her, his tone so friendly that she found herself agreeing at once. “We can get a sandwich and coffee on the hovercraft. You’ve had lunch?”

“Yes, thank you.” The shepherd’s pie and milk pudding still felt solid inside her. She settled herself without fuss and sat back in the comfortable seat; she had little intention of talking and remembering his remarks to Miss Timms, she imagined that he probably felt the same. And indeed, he had nothing to say until they were clear of the last suburbs and racing towards Dover.

“This case,” he began, “I’ll fill in a few details. The little chap’s name is Duert, he’s two and four months, a healthy specimen and being sensibly brought up. He’s lively and big for his age... his father’s a big man. He has a posterior fossa fracture and there is a good deal of swelling of the brain. I have operated to relieve this but there was a CSF leak and I’m worried that there might be a latent infection. He is in the children’s hospital in Amsterdam; his parents live in The Hague, but I can keep a closer eye on him if he’s on my ward. He’s in a side ward and you will be doing day duty, probably your free time will be curtailed for a few days; it will be made up to you later. His father is the director of a hospital in The Hague but he visits whenever he can spare a minute. His mother expects their second child within a few weeks; she’s a level-headed girl and realises that there is little that she can do at the moment. That is why she begged for an English nurse; she feels that she can phone you and talk about Duert. She visits him each evening with her husband and she is convinced that he will recover...”

“And you? What do you think?” asked Rose.

“He has a very good chance but it depends largely on good nursing now. You have nursed similar cases?”

“Oh, yes. Won’t there be a language difficulty?”

“No. At least not in the hospital, the night nurse is English-speaking and so is the ward sister. I doubt if you could hold a general conversation with them, but you will find that they understand medical terms. My registrar speaks excellent English. You will have a room in the nurses’ hostel and when Duert goes home I hope that you will be able to go with him until such time as Christina has got things organised.”

“Christina?”

“His mother. They have a splendid nanny, not a trained nurse though, but able to take over from you once Duert is out of danger.”

After that he was silent, leaving her to her own thoughts. She couldn't help but reflect that if it had been Sadie sitting beside him, he might have found something to talk about. He was treating her pleasantly enough but with, she suspected, indifference. To be expected, she told herself philosophically, after all, she was a nurse, being driven to a case by the patient's doctor; and the patient was all that they had in common.

She hadn't been on a hovercraft before; she found it exhilarating. She ate the sandwiches and drank the coffee offered her and sat composedly while Mr Werdmer ter Sane studied the papers he drew from his brief case.

It was still light when they landed, and since the land was flat and the sky wide, she was able to see around her. She longed to ask what this was and that was, but her companion, beyond making sure that she was comfortable, had little to say. Only as they slowed to go through the lighted outskirts of Amsterdam, did he observe, “A very restful travelling companion—no girlish exclamations of delight, no endless questions about windmills and clogs, no demands to know when we should arrive. I must congratulate you, Nurse Comely.”

To which she made no reply at all.

Once through the suburbs, the city took on the enchantment she had remembered from her brief visit. The sky was clear and starlit, silhouetting the gabled houses against the deep blue above, and once they were away from the main streets, there were only the street lamps reflected in the canal water.

She hadn't asked where they were going; she hoped just for a moment that they would go to his house first, but she was to be disappointed. They left the quiet old streets presently and turned back into the main part of the city. A short cut, she guessed, and knew that she was right when they turned into a wide courtyard with the hospital, quite unmistakable, beyond. Mr Werdmer ter Sane switched off the engine. “Well, here we are,” he observed quietly, and got out to open her door and usher her through the wide entrance.

There was no waiting about; he lifted a hand to the porter on duty and led the way to a row of lifts. They got out on the second floor and Rose followed silently as he trod unhurriedly a long wide corridor and through swing doors.

It was very quiet; there were wards on either side, their doors open and night lights burning and the shadowy figures of nurses going to and fro. Mr Werdmer ter Sane tapped on a door at the end of the corridor and went in.

There was a cot in the room, barely visible in the dim light, surrounded by all the impedimenta of post-operative equipment. Sitting side by side in chairs drawn up to the cot were two people. They turned their heads as Rose and Mr Werdmer ter Sane went in and the man got up. He was a big man, heavily built and tall, and he looked tired and very anxious.

“Sybren—you've made good time.” He looked at Rose and smiled. He was good-looking and his eyes were very blue. “And this will be our English nurse.” He put out his hand and then he put a hand on his wife's shoulder. “Chrissy, now you will be able to sleep.”

The girl took her eyes from the small figure in the cot. Mrs ter Brandt wasn't pretty, but her eyes were a lovely grey in a white face. She smiled at Rose.

“Thank you for coming.” She got up and offered a hand. “You're from St Bride's, aren't you? The best nurse they have got, Sybren says. Little Duert will be all right now.”

Rose said comfortingly, “I'm sure he will and I promise you I'll look after him, Mevrouw ter Brandt.”

The two men had turned aside to talk but presently Doctor ter Brandt said, “We're going home now, darling— Sybren will take a look at Duert and explain things to...” He glanced over to Rose.

“May I call you Rose? She will come on duty in the morning and you can phone her then and come and see Duert later in the day. And I promise you we won’t pull any wool over your eyes, darling.”

Rose saw the look which passed between them; loving and trusting and very understanding. It must be awful, she thought, as she wished them a calm good night.

Mr Werdmer ter Sane closed the door. “Now, before we find Night Sister and get you settled, let us go over the notes...” He gave her a sharp glance. “You are not too tired? There will be a meal for you presently, but this is too good an opportunity to miss.”

He went and looked at the unconscious child, examining him gently. “He’s no worse, but he’s by no means out of the wood. I want every smallest change noted and I want to be told at once. I’ll give you a phone number and you are to ring me without waiting to report to the ward sister. Tell her, of course, but I want to know first. You understand?”

Rose nodded. She was tired and hungry but since Mr Werdmer ter Sane didn’t appear to be either, she supposed she would have to forget that for the time being. He began to go over the case papers with her in great detail, and when he had finished, “You understand all that, Nurse? Have you any questions?”

“No, not at present,” she told him and he turned to ring the bell by the cot. “Night Nurse,” he told her, “while Duert and Christina are here she isn’t needed.”

The girl who came in quietly was big and fair-haired and pretty. She said something to Mr Werdmer ter Sane and smiled at Rose, who said “Hullo”, and offered a hand.

“Wiebeke—Rose,” he said briefly. He went on in Dutch so that Rose couldn’t understand but when he had finished he said, “I was telling Wiebeke that you will be on duty at seven o’clock in the morning. She speaks English but if you have any hang-ups for heaven’s sake give me a ring.” He turned back to the night nurse, saying over his shoulder, “Wait a minute, will you? I’ll introduce you to Night Sister.”

It was five minutes before he had talked to Wiebeke and taken another look at the child. Rose said good night to the other girl and followed him back the way they had come and into a small office. Night Sister was a large bony woman with a calm, middle-aged face. She got up from the desk as they went in, smiled at them both and asked in English, “This is our English nurse?” She shook hands and listened while Mr Werdmer ter Sane talked and then said, “We will go at once to the hostel, you must be tired, and tomorrow morning at seven o’clock we will see you here on duty. We are glad to welcome you, Nurse Comely.”

She glanced towards their companion. “You are going home, Doctor?”

“No, not just yet. I’ll wish you good night.” He nodded to them both and walked back the way they had come.

“He is anxious,” explained Night Sister, “he is—how do you say?—godfather to the little Duert. We go this way.”

Rose hardly noticed where they were going; she was famished and wanted a bed and a bath more than anything else in the world. It was several floors down and any number of passages before they went through a door and up more stairs leading to silent corridors lined with doors. Night Sister opened one. “Your room, Zuster Comely.”

Rose went past her into a small, nicely furnished room, very clean and bright. “I’m not a sister,” she said shyly. “Only a staff nurse.”

Night Sister laughed. “Ah, but here we call all nurses ‘Zuster’ and the sister is ‘Hoofdzuster’. The bathroom is at the end of this passage, there are six—but first someone will be coming very soon with your supper. And in the morning a nurse will show you where to go. You will be called at six o’clock.” She smiled again. “I hope you will be happy with us. Good night.”

Left to herself, Rose unpacked and then since her supper hadn’t arrived, undressed and got into her dressing-gown. She was brushing her hair when there was a tap on the door and a young woman came in with a tray. She nodded and smiled and put the tray on the writing-desk under the window

and when Rose asked, “What shall I do with the tray?” giggled gently, shrugged her shoulders and went away.

The supper was all that she could have wished for: soup and savoury pancakes and a bowl of yoghurt and a jug of piping-hot coffee. Rose disposed of everything and crept down to the bathroom past the silent rooms. The water was hot and she lay for a while going over the events of the day, then mindful of the early start in the morning she got out reluctantly and presently was back in her room. A rather nice room, she thought drowsily, putting out the bedside light.

It seemed that she had only just shut her eyes when she was being gently shaken awake. A girl was bending over her and she sat up in bed, not sure where she was for the moment. The girl smiled. “You get up,” she said, and “I fetch you.” At the door she paused, clutching her dressing-gown about her. “Okay?”

“Okay,” said Rose and jumped out of bed.

She was fetched by a whole bunch of girls who shook hands in a friendly fashion and exclaimed over the old fashioned uniform St Bride’s nurses still wore. They bore her along with them, back down the stairs and into the hospital and then underground. The canteen was large and cheerful with tables for four or six and a long counter along one end. Rose, who was hungry again, was disappointed to see that there was only bread and butter and slices of cheese and great urns of coffee. Perhaps just as well, she decided, catching sight of the clock, there wouldn’t be time for any more.

Conversation was sparse but friendly at the table, because eating and drinking were more important than gossip and presently they swept her along once more and left her at the children’s unit.

Rose went in through the swing doors to the familiar sounds of shouts and cries and the general din made by a number of toddlers even if they weren’t so well. The office she had been taken to was close by, she tapped on the door and went in.

Night Sister was there, still on duty, and there was another, younger woman with her who got up from the stool she was sitting on.

“Nurse Comely. I am glad to meet you. I am the hoofdzuster of the ward and presently I will explain your duty times to you, but now I think it best if you go to relieve the night nurse, please. Mr Werdmer ter Sane will be in presently and he will wish to see you also.”

Rose went along the corridor and opened the end-room door. Wiebeke was sitting at a small table filling in the charts, but she looked round as Rose went in and beamed at her. “You have slept? Yes? We have had a good night. Duert is still unconscious. I tell you the report now?”

Wiebeke’s English was sometimes quaint, but understandable, besides the treatments and feeds and charts were the same as she was used to at St Bride’s, only in another language. When she had made quite sure that she had understood Wiebeke’s report, Rose bade her goodbye and set about her day’s tasks.

She had just finished giving Duert a nasal feed when Mr Werdmer ter Sane came in. His good morning was quiet and he went at once to look and having seen the child sat down to read through the reports and charts.

When he had finished he asked: “Have you anything to report, Nurse Comely?”

“Nothing more than is written there, Sir.”

He got up and went over to the cot. “Let’s see now...” He went over the small body very carefully, looking for some sign of awakening consciousness, and found none. Presently he straightened up. “I’ll be back presently,” he told her. “Mevrouw ter Brandt will be coming in this afternoon. I’d be obliged if you will be here when she comes; it will make things easier for her if she can talk to you.”

There wasn’t a great deal to do but she needed to keep the little boy under constant surveillance. She was relieved briefly for her midday meal and soon after she returned Christina ter Brandt arrived. Her husband and Mr Werdmer ter Sane came with her. They went to bend over the cot until Dr ter Brandt said quietly: “Sit down, darling, he’s doing as well as we hoped. Sybren and I are going to

have a talk in Sister's office. Shall I get someone to send in a pot of tea? You two girls can have a chat while we are gone."

He laid a large comforting hand on his wife's shoulder and smiled at Rose.

Left to themselves, Rose brought her stool close to the cot so that she could watch little Duert. "He's a lovely boy," she said in her pleasant voice. "Has he blue eyes?"

"Like his father's." Christina patted herself. "This one's to be a girl with grey eyes like mine. I don't mind what colour they are but Duert has set his heart on it." She looked away for a moment. "You haven't seen any sign at all?"

"Not yet," said Rose gently, "it's always a long business, isn't it? We've had several like Duert at St Bride's; they took their time but they all went home fit and well."

Christina ter Brandt smiled rather shakily. "Bless you, what a comfort you are. You think he'll—he'll be none the worse?"

"Yes, I think that. I think Mr Werdmer ter Sane thinks that too."

"He's a tower of strength. You met him when you were on holiday?"

"Well, yes. I banged on his door because we were lost and there was a fearful storm and he very kindly gave us tea."

"Who's us?"

She wasn't sure if her companion was listening, her eyes were on her small son, but Rose went on talking comfortably, anything was better than sitting in silence. "Sadie—one of my friends. She is a dear and very, very pretty—she is marvellous with children too. She and Mr Werdmer ter Sane got on awfully well..."

"And you don't?"

"Oh, yes, of course." Rose remembered his opinion of her and went a delicate pink and Christina gave her a second look. "He's not very easy to know," she said casually, "plenty of girl friends when he has the time for them, but no sign of getting married. Did he fall for your friend Sadie?"

"Well, I think he might have done if they had seen more of each other."

"I am glad it's you...may I call you Rose? I think you are the sort of person who won't get impatient if I burst into tears or have sudden hysterics."

"Indeed I won't." Rose got up and eased the small body gently from one side to the other, took the pulse in the flaccid wrist, charted it and sat down again. A tray of tea was brought in then and Rose was asked to pour out.

"This is fun," said Christina ter Brandt, taking her cup. "We've heaps of friends but I haven't wanted to see any of them since—since..." She took a sip of tea. "But it's great to be able to sit here with Duert and have someone to talk to who understands what's happened to him."

In a little while Dr ter Brandt came back, took another look at his little son, passed a gentle time of day with Rose and took his wife away.

They met Sybren in the corridor. "She's a darling," said Christina to him. "Do you know I feel quite different now she is here. She's so sure he's going to get better and so—so sensible and kind. When Duert is well enough to come home, she must come too, just for a bit," and at his look of doubt, "don't say it can't be done because between the pair of you, you can do anything you've set your heart on." She looked at her husband. "Duert, dear, please..."

He had an arm round her shoulders. "Provided Rose will agree, we'll get her by hook or by crook." He looked at his friend. "Well, what do you say, Sybren?"

"She is a good nurse and if you want her, we'll arrange things."

Christina said thoughtfully, "Would you rather have had her friend—what was her name—Sadie? Very pretty, Rose tells me. And a good nurse too."

He smiled down at her. "Very pretty, but I don't think we could better our Rose; unflappable and sensible and somehow slides into place without any fuss." He bent to kiss her cheek. "We'll have good news for you, Chrissy, just be patient."

Rose was patient too; perhaps the small child's life depended on her regular frequent observations, the careful taking of pulse, checking the slow breathing, the level of consciousness. She was relieved for her meals but that was all, but she had known that already; when she went off duty in the evening she had her supper and then went for a brisk walk, sometimes by herself, more often with one or other of the nurses. They were friendly girls but she had little time to get to know them. Wiebeke she saw morning and evening, but beyond giving each other the report they wasted no time. Little Duert's life depended on constant observation until he regained consciousness and they both knew it. For the next few days nothing else mattered.

Christina ter Brandt came each day to sit by her little son's cot and hold his hand while she talked to Rose. That she was happily married was evident, just as it was evident that she was wholeheartedly loved. Rose, after a few days, found herself liking her very much, just as she liked Dr ter Brandt. Two people such as they were deserved a miracle.

Mr Werdmer ter Sane came twice a day to study the charts carefully and examine his small patient. He had little to say to Rose although he was always pleasant and careful to enquire as to her welfare, enquiries she brushed aside just as pleasantly. She was beginning to feel the lack of exercise and change of scene but she had no intention of saying so.

It was on the fourth day, half way through the morning, that she noticed the faintest of movements and the little boy's breathing changed slightly from slow and shallow to a steadier rhythm. She went to the phone in a flash and asked for Mr Werdmer ter Sane to come at once, and then whisked back to the cotside, taking another look before ringing Sister's office. Only there was no one there to answer. Rose went back to the cot, took down the side and perched close to the small form. It seemed to her that the level of unconsciousness was lighter even in those few minutes. She stroked the little hand she was holding and began to sing very softly: nursery rhymes, one after the other, and was rewarded by the flicker of an eyelid. When the door opened and Mr Werdmer ter Sane came quietly in, she flapped a hand at him and went on singing "Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle". She had a small high voice a little breathless now with excitement. "The cow jumped over the moon," she went on, aware that he was standing behind her.

The cherub in the cot opened two astonishingly blue eyes, said sleepily "lickle dog", and closed them again.

"Oh, my goodness me," said Rose in a whisper. She took the large hand on the counterpane beside her and gave it a squeeze, quite unaware of what she was doing. But only for a moment; she dropped it like a hot brick and stood up, to recite very accurately exactly what had occurred.

Mr Werdmer ter Sane grunted and bent over the little boy who stirred under his gentle touch and then opened his eyes again. He said something in Dutch and straightened to his great height again. "I do believe we're coming out of the wood, Rose."

Very much to her surprise he bent and kissed her cheek. "Good girl." He went to the phone and made several calls and very soon Sister was there as well as his registrar. The three of them talked quietly and then the two men examined the child very gently. Rose stood a little apart. Sister was there, handling things and dealing with their needs and there was nothing for her to do. Sister and the registrar went presently and Mr Werdmer ter Sane asked her to stay by the cot while he phoned and then presently he gave her careful instructions and went away too.

There was little enough to do; only watch carefully and carry out the usual nursing chores. It was half an hour later that he came back and this time he had the ter Brandts with him.

Rose didn't say anything; indeed they weren't aware of anyone else except the little boy in the cot. She slid away to the desk at the window and turned her back and was surprised when Mr Werdmer ter Sane joined her.

There wasn't anything much to see; a variety of gabled roofs and an enormous number of chimney pots and above them, a wide pale blue sky. She stared out at them and wished she could think of something to say and presently he went away again without having uttered a word, back to the cot at the other side of the room and now it was Christina beside her.

"Rose, oh Rose, you don't know how happy I am. Oh, my dear, we're so grateful and thankful." She turned a tear-stained face to her. "We'll never be able to thank you enough."

"But I haven't done anything," said Rose, feeling awkward.

"Oh, yes, you have. You'd made up your mind that little Duert was going to get better and you've had no off-duty and you've had your eyes on him all the time. That was clever, singing the nursery rhymes. Sybren says he's not out of the wood yet but it's time and careful nursing. You'll stay, won't you? I can't nurse him myself, but I know he is safe with you."

"Of course, I'll stay. I am so happy for you and your husband, you must be in the seventh heaven. And I'll take great care of him, I promise you, and Wiebeke is wonderful, you know. You'll be able to sleep at night now."

"Yes, oh yes." Christina looked up at her husband who had just joined her. He smiled a little at her and then looked at Rose. "We are in your debt for the rest of our lives, Rose."

When they had gone she took up her station by the cot again. Perhaps there would be days ahead when not much progress would be made, but it was a start. She took Duert's hand in hers once more and started to sing "Ride a cock horse" in her soft little voice.

Mr Werdmer ter Sane, coming back up the corridor, paused to listen outside the door. He frowned heavily, aware of annoyance because Rose, that most uninteresting of girls, disturbed him. A pity that Christina had set her heart on having her back home when little Duert was well enough to leave hospital. Hopefully, she wouldn't need to stay long.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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