

A Hospital Idyll.

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SISTER was busy in the acute ward, and had left the children to the care of the new probationer.

"She can't 'spect us to obey her," said Teddy (No. 5) to No. 6 (the old case of empyema), with a scornful stress on *her*. "Why," he added, "if you call 'Nurse' she doesn't even know you mean her, she hasn't even got a proper cap, and them's frills on her frock! She can't 'spect us to obey her yet."

So the decree went forth and they mutinied. Some of them slipped out of bed on to the floor and were hailed with joy by those who could not. The first thing to do was to swop toys all round; after that they mounted their beds again (the biggest of them "bunking up" the little ones, before scrambling up themselves), and prepared for a "jolly good dance" on the spring mattresses. The new nurse was at a discount. There was something in the expression of Teddy's eyes that held her silent. He looked so terribly as though he had something unpleasant to say, and would only be too glad of the chance to say it. But for that she really would have tackled the others. Ted, combined with a nauseating sense of home-sickness, was too much for her.

It spoke volumes in her favour that she never for a moment under-estimated Teddy. She saw from the first that he was to be reckoned with. The other children knew that too, so they just left her to Teddy, acting on instinct, and tucking up their nightgowns danced to their hearts' content. So it came about that all who could jump did jump with all the vigour they could muster, be it little or much. Some jumped gingerly on one leg; some with bandaged arms were scarcely better balanced. Some danced with heads that they strove to keep "at rest" by holding the shoulders and neck rigid. An infinity of pain must have gone to the pleasure of it; but all who could dance, did. Some could not dance at all: and this was sad. These talked of the time when they should be well and of how they would dance then.

"Jump! I'll jump nearly up to the ceiling," said Teddy, defiantly, gulping down a sob, his thin face distorted by an effort to keep back the envy and longing he felt. If he hadn't known them all so well, how he could have hated them for their good fortune. So Teddy turned crustily to No. 6 (who had raised himself on the elbow of his "good side" to watch the fun), and said:— "You never *could* dance much, I should think, No. 6, even when your side wasn't bad." Now

No. 6 was of undeniably podgy build, and Teddy's judgment was unerring. He had meant to say it crossly, and to hurt; but the old empyema's look of pain disarmed him, so that his voice trailed off quite caressingly, and his eyes beamed with honest affection. For although Teddy could not help being glad that he was not the only one who had to lie still, he really did feel sorry for poor old No. 6, who never could get along without his tube.

No. 6 smiled back at him. "It's only because I'm an old empyema that I can't, though; I ain't got no breath; that's where it is, you see. I say, Ted, wouldn't we show 'em if only we was all right, eh? I reckon we'd be the best jumpers in the whole ward, don't you?"

Ted laughed and kicked out with his "good leg." "I *feel* I could jump up to the ceiling now, but for this old splint. I often *do* it, too, when the pain isn't bad and the others are all asleep. Schoop! It gives me pins and needles all over to think of it. Swooping through the air like a bird! Why, sometimes I jump clean through the window on to that big branch of the tree, and sit there swinging. It's fine! But sometimes my head gets swimmy and I slip: then I get all sticky with fright and keep on feeling it over and over again when I try to go to sleep afterwards. That's the horrid part. But it's jolly when my head don't swim, and the birds come and talk to me: they just sit round with their little heads on one side, and look at me with their bright eyes, and say things to me; nice things that I can understand, too, only I forget when I come in, somehow. Ain't it a pity, No. 6?"

No. 6 was the most sympathetic listener in the world. He understood that sort of thing himself and didn't think it nonsense. He had spent too much of his short life in bed for that.

Now No. 4, on the other side of Ted, had no sense. It was no comfort to talk to him. He would have said, "Oh, you story-teller," or something like that. "See my finger wet, see my finger dry," he would ask sceptically, when No. 5 and No. 6 were talking together, asking them to *swear* to the wonderful unheard-of things they were saying. "Shut up!" Ted would say, screwing himself as close to his splint as he possibly could, away from the objectionable No. 4.

"Honest Injin!" No. 6 would swear, complacently, the Resident Surgeon had taught him to say that when his word was called into question. And "Honest Injin" always came promptly in response to "See my finger wet?"

But No. 4 *was* aggravating. Once he had dared to put his tongue out at Teddy: all the little ones sat round and stared, shocked beyond

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