

you're in here. Mrs. C, that stitch will come out today. Mrs. D, you'll go home this morning." And off she went, leaving Mrs. D in the seventh heaven of delight and the rest of us already absorbed in the important affair of Mrs. C's stitch.

This was the event of the day, the event that made this day different from the other days and we gave it all our attention. Would it be the red-headed surgeon who was unmarried and fairly unapproachable or would it be the young doctor who was so charming and said to be a prospective father? This poor man had brought his wife round the ward last week to show her "where she was to come" and every word of their conversation had been faithfully recorded by the accompanying nurse. We told stories of previous stitches, our own and other peoples. Would Sister get through her nappy-counting in time to attend in person or who would she send as a substitute? It was very exciting.

At nine our bundles were brought to us again. We fed them and they were quiet once more.

We resumed our discussion and bid good-bye to Mrs. D, but Mrs. D did not count any more. She was going home. Her baby was dressed in its own clothes. Her corner of the ward was swept of all personality and clean and awaiting a new occupant. Mrs. D wandered vaguely in and out already in another world in spirit but still sufficiently one of us to know better than to sit on the beds, a heinous crime!

At ten came Ovaltine and we were put down to rest. "Not you, Mrs. C, because of your stitch. Hurry up, Mrs. A. What! FOUR pillows, Sister would kill you! Mrs. B, you can't read now, you're not an invalid! Oh, Mrs. D, you've gone home of course!" Then in the ensuing silence, voices from the corridor, "You haven't put Mrs. C down, have you?" "No, is Sister coming?" "She's not finished yet!" "Well, I suppose she wants me to see to Mrs. C. Help me finish here, there's a dear!" And so on. We sighed—one mystery was solved anyway. Nurse arrived with much clatter and went to work and the tension increased. We lay listening to every movement. Nurse chattered away about Sister and her peculiarities and admired Mrs. C's face-cream, also she adored The Duke of Edinburgh. "You needn't worry, dear, it won't hurt a bit. Doctor's ever so gentle." Mrs. C's nerves by this time were at breaking point. We lay silently, waiting for the door. It swung open, suddenly—a male voice, "Good morning, nurse. Good morning, Mrs. C (Red-head, of course, bad luck). How do you feel, Mrs. C—that's good. It's terribly cold outside, you're in the best place." Heroically Mrs. C murmured, "Yes doctor," unbelieving. "What did you have, boy or girl?—Was that what you wanted? That's fine." Noise of taps and scrubbing. "Now, let's have a look—mmm—only one, Nurse, I think—mmm—yes—mmm—Where's Sister this morning, nurse?" Silence—and then suddenly startling us all practically out of bed, in she came. A little whirlwind. "Just too late," we thought. Bang went a window, carelessly left open. "Good morning, doctor," she said coldly, "have you everything you want." "Everything, sister, thank you, I've just finished. You'll be all right now, Mrs. C."

The relief was enormous. We relaxed. We had expected that Mrs. C would have treated us to at least one squeak or groan and we had been sweating in anticipation. Sister and the surgeon departed, leaving nurse to clear up and after much clatter of basins and observations on red hair and the Duke of Edinburgh again, she went herself and peace was restored.

It must have been longer than five minutes, but that was all it seemed, before chaos broke out again. The door was flung open and nurse was standing in the doorway distributing bed-pans as if she were dealing a hand of cards, curtains were drawn and in five minutes lunch was produced. We were hungry and ate it without comment and paid no attention to the nurse who wandered in half way through. "Anyone seen an extra salt-free fish?" They were always losing things anyhow

and would frequently wander in during non-peak periods to ask us if we had seen an extra bed, or Mrs. M's baby or Mrs. T's cascara or something similar and often they would come in, look round and go out again without saying anything at all. We questioned them about this and were informed that when "she" (sister) had nothing particular for them to do, she would send them searching for something that was temporarily mislaid. This particular nurse came in looking for a lost helping of fish—salt-free for patients with high blood pressure—forgot about it and went out looking for a missing mattress!

Babies again at one o'clock and then we really thought we had an hour to spare, but oh no, *this* was the time for "sitting up"! Sister was suddenly there. "Now then, Mrs. A, SIT UP or you'll have a retroverted uterus. You're not ILL, you know! Mrs. B, how many jugs of water have you drunk? Only two! You must drink six you know. Mrs. C are you feeling all right? Well, sit up then!" Sitting firmly on my fourth pillow I smiled confidentially. I knew for a fact that Mrs. B had only drunk *one* jug of water, but there was honour amongst us and we thought she was rather clever to get away with it. Besides, my fourth pillow was valuable.

Which goes to show how low we had fallen, for I must now say that no praise is too high for the staff of this maternity ward. They were quite marvellous. They slaved and worked all night and all day. They saved our lives and the lives of our babies one after the other and if they treated us as congenital idiots immediately afterwards, well, perhaps it was all we deserved. We were obstinate, we were rude about the food, we were helpless and fussy about our babies. We made no secret of our wanting to go home. The more hardened of us defied authority in a most ungrateful way. And no one is more smug than a new and madly maternal mother! But "they" were always cheerful and kind and as delighted with the babies as we were ourselves. We were simply not *allowed* to have anything wrong with us. Sister told me afterwards of some of the minor pin-pricks—twenty-four night-gowns for twenty-five beds, never enough sheets or nappies, laundry that was always late, ward-maids who failed to turn up. Most of it was blamed on the National Health. "Before the National Health we had Izal Toilet Rolls—*Now* we have GOVERNMENT PROPERTY!" said she, exploding with indignation and sure enough there they were, all printed "Government Property." There was no doubt about it, Sister and her accomplices were absolutely wonderful.

But we did not think so at three in the afternoon when the routine started again and we were bullied, cajoled, admonished, fed and doctored until seven o'clock when the fathers were due! We all slopped luxuriously then and put on our lipstick. The fathers came sheepishly and looked at the babies. We were dying to tell them about Mrs. C's stitch. "But I must read you Aunt Jane's letter first, dear," I said. "Let me get it for you," said my husband. "Oh no, its quite all right, I can reach it." The words came easily to my lips, "I'm not *ill*, you know."

### King Edward's Hospital Fund for London.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER presided at the fifty-seventh annual meeting of King Edward's Hospital Fund for London at St. James's Palace on June 30th. He said that the Annual Report for 1953 recorded a year less packed with sensational changes for the hospital world than the years had been for some long time past. The outstanding event was the establishment of the Matrons' Staff College at Holland Park. "Although I have spoken about this recently I think the Council would like to know that the first courses being held there are proving most valuable and in particular that a one-month refresher course held last March for 12 matrons chosen from large London hospitals showed quite clearly that real help can be given to hospital matrons by a short break of this kind, enabling them to keep abreast of good progress and practice in other hospitals."

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