

Elizabeth's Baby.

Elizabeth's hair was arranged in two neat plaits, and adorned with scarlet satin bows.

The delicate pink in her cheeks was deepened by excitement, and her eyes were bright with fever.

Nurse Walpole, on her way up the ward with an empty dinner tray, paused beside her bed.

"All Right!" she exclaimed in tones of mock severity, "If your temperature is up at two o'clock, Mrs. Nine, you won't see the baby."

"Oh! yes I will," said Elizabeth with a coquettish little toss of her head, "You wouldn't 'ave the 'eart to turn 'er aw'y if you seed 'Enry a carryin' of 'er in."

"Oh, yes, I should," replied Nurse Walpole in a determined way, "I would not let them get as far as the ward door."

Elizabeth's face fell. "Let 'em come just this Sunday 'cos it's Easter," she pleaded. "I put on the ribbons for Baby 'cos she do love a bright colour, bless 'er little 'eart, and Nurse, if you only seed 'er totty little curls an' 'er eyes as blue. She'll 'ave on the pelisse wot I mide 'er—you couldn't 'elp lovin' 'er—I know you couldn't."

But Nurse Walpole only shook her head at Elizabeth's chart, and then disappeared into the ward kitchen.

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At three o'clock the ward was full of the patients' friends. Elizabeth kept her eyes fixed on the door. She was sure that Henry would be punctual, as he was bringing the baby.

The woman in the next bed was talking volubly to her husband, but she saw the growing disappointment in Elizabeth's face, and in a pause in the conversation she pushed a pot of pink azaleas across her locker.

Elizabeth thanked her with a smile.

Mrs. Barnes with some difficulty raised herself on her elbow, and said in a stage whisper, "Don't you tike on—I've known 'em as much as three quarters of an hour lite."

Elizabeth, with her eyes on the clock, tried to smile, but it was a poor attempt.

Mr. Barnes, a corpulent person very ill at ease in his Sunday clothes, creaked across the floor to her bed.

"'Ave a pine apple drop—it 'ill 'elp to pass the time," he said cheerfully.

Elizabeth extracted one with difficulty, but she did not eat it. "I'll 'ave it when 'Enry comes," she said.

It was nearly four o'clock when she saw him come into the ward. There was no baby

in his arms. Her eyes grew suspiciously bright.

"Why 'Enry, you've come without Baby!"

Henry pulled a box from under the bed and sat down awkwardly on it. "It's like this," he said slowly, "she's bin bad with 'er teeth all the week, an' Mother thought she'd better stop in on account o' the 'eat."

Elizabeth's lip quivered. "I ain't thought o' nothin' else since Wednesday, when I got your card s'ying as you would bring 'er—"

"Mother give 'er some of the mixture sime as she 'ad before," said Henry.

"I don't believe it would 'ave done 'er a bit of 'arm to come out for an hour," exclaimed Elizabeth in injured tones. "I'm all for fresh air I am, an' I don't 'old with Mother's notions at all."

Henry made no response.

Elizabeth's expression instantly became an injured one.

"I can't mike out wots up with you—you're as dull as ditch water," she snapped.

He laughed in rather a forced way. "There's nothin' up with me. It's only to be expected as Mother an' I miss you a bit."

Elizabeth was distinctly mollified, and she smiled in a self-conscious manner. "Well, of course your mother's all right, but she don't see to things as I do, an' then 'er mem'ry is goin' fast."

There was an awkward pause.

"I 'ope she ain't usin' that cheap soap for Baby," said Elizabeth querulously.

"I'll ask 'er about it when I get back. Don't you get frettin' or you'll mike yourself worse." He rose to go.

"Wait a bit," said Elizabeth. She pulled off the scarlet bows and pushed them into his hand. "I want to 'ave these put on baby's dress—you know 'ow she loves a bright colour."

He stooped and kissed her, and then walked slowly down the ward. In the passage he encountered Nurse Walpole hurrying back to her duties. "Your wife is going on well," she said brightly.

"She give me these for the baby," said Henry, in husky tones. He held out the pieces of scarlet ribbon.

"Next time you come you must bring the baby to see her." Then she noticed that he was struggling for composure.

"I couldn't bring 'er," he said, with his face working with emotion. "I went for the doctor when she 'ad the fit, but 'e didn't get there in time." Then he placed the pieces of ribbon into her hand.

"I could 'ave took 'em if they 'ad bin white," he said, in a choked voice.

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