

EMMA.

BY MISS JESSIE CARGILL BEGG.

The great doctors had come and held a solemn conclave over Emma's leg. They decided that, after Christmas, she must be sent to a Convalescent Home, and have the open-air treatment.

Emma was awed into silence while her leg was being examined. She lay with Lizzy Jane's smug wax face pressed close to her; there was an excited patch of pink on her cheeks.

"I suppose you want another Lizzy Jane off the Christmas Tree," said the house surgeon with a smile.

"Oh, no!" replied Emma, with a nervous gasp; "there couldn't ever be another doll quite like her."

It was only a few nights later that a terrible catastrophe happened to Emma.

A careless probationer on night duty placed a small hand lamp down on Emma's dinner board, while she hunted for some splints in a cupboard close to the bed.

The board suddenly collapsed, and in a minute the bedclothes were on fire.

Emma was a sad little spectacle when the house surgeon had finished with her. A mask of lint covered the terrible burns on her face; her sight was gone for ever.

Sister had to be called up to try and stop the terrible screams that rent the air at intervals. After a time the morphia did its work and dulled Emma's sufferings. Her hot little hand relaxed its grip on Sister's wrist. "Put Lizzy Jane near me," she said.

Lizzy Jane was in the locker, carefully wrapped in a half sheet of *The Daily Mail*, to keep her frock clean.

"Don't tike the piper off of 'er," shrieked Emma, with the irritability of a very sick child; "she on'y 'as that off on a Sunday."

She grew quieter when she had the doll in her arms. "I can't see 'er, but I can feel 'er," she said drowsily to Sister.

Emma's recovery was very slow. But as Christmas drew near, Sister was glad to notice that she was taking an interest in the decorations for the ward; that she cried less when her dressings were done, and seemed more resigned to the loss of her sight. No one had had the heart to tell her that it was permanent. Emma fondly imagined that when her face was better she would be able to see like other little girls. She undid her meagre little plaits night

and morning, and felt about in her locker for her brush and comb and hair ribbon, so that Nurse Amy should not have to wait a minute when she came to do her hair. And she always said the same thing when Nurse Amy did appear on the scene. "I think I'm a 'eap better, don't you, Nurse?" And one night she added, "I'll not give a mite o' trouble if only I can see the Tree on Christmas Day."

"And if you can't, why then you'll just make the best of it," said Nurse Amy, as she combed out a rebellious curl.

"I don't know as I can make the best of it," replied Emma. Her mouth quivered painfully.

An unknown step passed Emma's bed soon after Nurse Amy had gone.

Emma's curiosity got the better of her. "Ullo!" she called out almost brightly.

"Ullo," replied a cheerful voice. The owner of it stopped and came over to the bed. "I'm Minnie Adams, an' I'm allowed up to-day."

"I reckon you're a big girl, an' you wear glasses," remarked Emma, meditatively.

Minnie gave a shrill laugh. "My word! you've 'it the wrong nile on the 'ead this time. I'm short, an' I've never 'ad nothink the matter with my eyes."

There was an awkward pause. Emma's sensitive little spirit scented resentment on Minnie's part.

"I 'ope you didn't mind me s'ying that about you," she said timidly. "I keep fancyin' wot people look like when they come in the ward on visitin' days."

Minnie gave another laugh, but it had a kindlier tone. "I tell you wot," she said, "I'll sit right 'ere beside you when they 'ave the Tree, an' tell you wot it looks like so as you won't mind."

"Will you?" Emma's voice sounded muffled. It might have been the lint over her mouth. "I shall mind a bit," she said quietly.

Minnie was visibly touched. "Look 'ere kid, when I see a thing comin' for you, I'll tell you afore you get it," she suggested.

Emma's depression seemed to vanish after this conversation. She endured the dressings with a fortitude that gratified the house surgeon and delighted Sister.

Just a week before Christmas, the lady who always gave the Tree for Egremont Ward, died suddenly, and Sister told Minnie that they would not be able to have one this year, and that the news must be kept from Emma as long as possible.

Emma woke on Christmas morning, and smiled sweetly to herself when she thought of the Tree. She could hardly eat her Christmas

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)