

along the corridor should be able to see him doing anything so menial as polishing a tea tin.

I rescued him half an hour later bathed in perspiration and almost suffocated by the fumes of formalin which had been used that morning for disinfecting purposes. Then there was the youth who went by the name of Lady — who, when led to a shelf and requested to wash it down with soap and water, informed me that he wasn't used to that sort of work, and would prefer to assist me with some of my writing.

This one when off duty in the late evening used to leave the hospital grounds wearing a khaki mackintosh with the collar turned up, and when safely outside, would take off his putties, turn down his coat collar so as to show an officer's khaki shirt, collar and tie, and walk down town complacently acknowledging the respectful salutes of the humble Tommies he met, who took him for a captain at the very least. He did it once too often and was awarded fourteen days C.B.

Passed on from ward to ward by sorely tried Sisters he found a resting place in the cook-house, where he might be seen at any time of the day in very greasy overalls playing at cleaning saucepans or leisurely peeling carrots and turnips. Also an amiable cherubic-looking boy whose career of two days' hard work was brief and bright. The first day he strolled about and watched the other orderly work for most of the morning. For the rest of the day he helped himself to half days off duty without leave. The second morning he was sent in a desperate hurry to fetch the medical officer to the ward to see for himself the epileptic fits of a certain patient he was anxious to make special notes on. By the time he reached the foot of the staircase it evidently occurred to him that he might as well dine first, so he retired to the orderlies' quarters, waited half an hour until their dinner was served, and reported to the doctor after two o'clock parade. He too drifted to the cookhouse.

Then there was a succession for a fortnight of "special" orderlies who relieved each other on duty with a suicidal prisoner in my side ward. Relieved each other in theory, for it was quite a usual thing to find that the one in charge had gone off duty or slipped downstairs for a meal, and left the suicide to his own devices. No reasoning on my part or plain talk from the medical officer could make one of them feel his responsibility, and after being reminded by the Colonel that if the patient was left for a minute he would probably kill himself somehow, and that the full blame, with the severest of punishments, would fall on the shoulders of the orderly who was supposed to be looking after him, he walked off to the next ward and took a hand of cards with some patients.

The orderlies acting as "specials" were more causes of anxiety to me than the suicide himself. There was one who, relieved for three-quarters of an hour at dinner-time, would stroll back an hour and a-half later, and then be missing shortly

afterwards, without reporting that he was about to leave us, because he considered he had worked a reasonable time, and the man appointed to relieve him had not appeared.

The night "special," before my astonished eyes, would place himself on a cushioned chair with his feet on another, and be snoring in a few seconds.

I never yet met one who could be really impressed with any sense of responsibility or blame. No qualm of pity for their unfortunate Ward Sister ever prevented them from carrying off, without permission, to their own quarters, articles of ward equipment, such as brooms, hot-water bottles, crockery, &c. Needless to say, these were never returned. No worry about the day of reckoning, when the books would be set and the inventory taken, ever prevented them from using patients' food cloths to clean brasses with, or from scorching towels and tea-cloths to shreds on top of the hot-water boiler, instead of hanging them to dry on a moderately warm radiator.

One thing I have learned is that there is absolutely no limit to an orderly's appetite. He may be depended upon to eat anything, and everything before him and then go across to the quarters for his dinner. I am reminded of two hungry creatures who passed a few hours of leisure daily together in my wards for about a fortnight. They were possessed of the healthiest of appetites. Indeed, one afternoon, when the nurse left in charge of the ward had cut all the bread and butter and cake needed for the patients' tea, and had gone into one of the small wards out of sight, they helped themselves to so much of the provisions prepared that when tea-time came she had half of her work to do again. I ought to mention that, as well as helping themselves to the patients' tea, they also took each other "off duty" an hour before their time, and she saw no more of them that evening. Looking back, it seems to me that these two were the worst I have ever had. One of these was remarkable for his red hair, and the habit of going to sleep in any out-of-sight corner he could find. I found him more than once shut up in a very large cupboard opening into the ward, with his head on a basket, the picture of sleeping innocence. He would be sent on an errand to the quartermaster's stores, or the cookhouse, and when sought for after long waiting would be found peacefully stretched out on a grassy bank.

The other man nearly excited a very helpless palsied nerve case into a fit, by snatching dainties away from him, and putting them into his own mouth. The patient was for some time seriously worse, in consequence.

This is the only instance I know of an orderly being unkind, and it really was more a matter of selfish mischief. He was court-martialled and severely punished. When I speak in a critical spirit of the orderlies I do so from the point of view of a Ward Sister responsible for the ward management and daily work. Some of them I have liked for many reasons, and they were

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)