

sympathy was gratefully accepted by the little Christ Child?

"'Twas in the Winter cold" broke her down altogether, and caused her bruised eye to throb and smart.

But tea-time and the arrival of Mr. 'Arris restored her spirits. He came into the ward with his peaked cap pulled down over his eyes and pulling at the coloured, knotted handkerchief round his neck.

"'Ello?" he remarked casually to his better half.

"Take yer 'at off," she responded. "Don't be so igerant."

He proceeded to pull from his pocket a damp bag of squashed grapes, which he silently laid on the sheet in front of her.

"Can't yer remember yer 'aint in yer own 'ome; these sheets is clean, I'll 'ave yer to know. The nusses put 'em on fresh this mornin'."

Mr. 'Arris made no reply, but removed the grapes and stretched his legs out as far as they would go.

Sister coming up at this moment greeted him pleasantly:

"Doesn't the ward look pretty?"

"It does that, Ma," replied Mr. 'Arris, and the conversation would have languished if Mrs. 'Arris had not remarked, in a loud aside, that he might 'ave been brought up with the 'ogs.

Curiously these remarks in no way seemed to interfere with the 'Arris conjugal enjoyment, and neither of the pair alluded in the most distant manner to the *fracas* which was the cause of Mrs. 'Arris' presence in the Hospital.

Patients and nurses both were happy, but very weary, when the lights were lowered, yet Sister paused for a moment at No. 14.

"I hope Mr. Harris enjoyed himself?" she said.

"Well 'e did I am obliged, but I 'ope you'll excuse him not acting the gentleman; 'e's a very igerant man is 'Arris, but there's no more 'arm in him than an unborn babe, 'cept when 'es in drink.

"Gawd bless yer, my dear. Good night."

H. H.

### BARGAIN MONTH—BENDUBLE SHOE COMPANY.

Bargain Month at the Benduble Shoe Company, Commerce House, 72, Oxford Street, W.1., First Floor, is a month to make a note of. For the goods of this company have a well-established and deserved reputation, and the bargains offered from January 7th to February 2nd are real bargains the reductions being on regular stock goods. We advise our readers, therefore, to study our front cover, to carefully preserve the Bargain Month Coupon, and to be among the first to present it at the Benduble Showrooms. First come, first served.

If it is impossible for you to call you will receive, on request, by return a free booklet, from which you can select your bargains. In this case also, in ordering, the Bargain Month coupon must be enclosed.

## THE OPTIMISTIC PATIENT.

BY JESSIE CARGILL BEGG.

George Edwardes sat on a bench in the 'Out Patients' Department of the L— Hospital. He was old and frail and poorly clad. A cup of coffee from the stall failed to warm him. He was lost in thought when a nurse tapped him on the shoulder and told him to go in and see the surgeon.

"Well, George," said Mr. Beckett, "I hope you have made your mind up this time."

George tried to smile. "It's a bit difficult, Sir, on account of Eliza, and bein' Christmas-time."

Mr. Beckett looked rather surprised. "You don't mean you are going to let Christmas stand in the way of your having a very necessary operation?" he remarked, sternly.

George looked vaguely uncomfortable. "I do, Sir; I've always giv' Eliza a good Christmas, and I mean to go on doin' it till I'm taken."

Mr. Beckett tapped impatiently on the table with his fountain pen. "It's perfectly absurd," he said, severely. "This operation must either be done on Thursday or I wash my hands of the whole thing; you quite understand?"

"Yes, Sir; I quite understand. But you don't understand Eliza."

"Well, I shall expect you in Clarence Ward to-morrow, and don't you fail me," said the surgeon, curtly.

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Eliza was a woman of few words. When George told her she said, "Least said, soonest mended," and started to do some washing for him, which included a hair brush in the last stages of decay and devoid of at least half of its bristles, and a large grey shawl full of gaping holes.

George was very relieved. His forced hilarity did not deceive Eliza. But it spurred her on to be jocular, and they arrived at the hospital apparently with not a care in the world.

Eliza sailed up the ward beaming at all the men, and stopping to look at the decorations. George found something amusing in everything—even in the fact that Eliza was leaving him. They had never been parted for a single day.

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Eliza came to the hospital on Christmas Day. George had had his operation the day before. He did not feel "up" to visitors, but Eliza must come in for some of the fun. The entertainment and tea-party would make up to her for having lost Christmas in her own home. He must keep it from her that he was in great pain. He smiled cheerily as she stooped to kiss him.

"I'm keepin' my chin up all right," he joked, while he clenched his fists under the bedclothes. Eliza's spirits rose. The air of jollity in the ward, the bright lights, the crowds of visitors, and the musical entertainment filled her with excitement. A lady provided her with tea and a generous slice of plum cake. She munched happily with her eyes fixed on the piano.

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