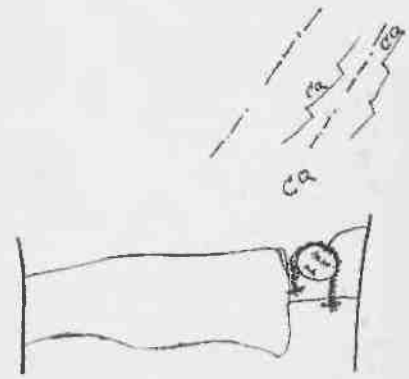
THEY CALL THEM CAMISOLES

"They Call Them Camisoles"

By

WILMA WILSON



LYMANHOUSE
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

Dedicated
To Sister, of course.

THEY CALL THEM CAMISOLES

An open letter to the girls of Dormitory 4, Ward 6, Camarillo State Hospital, Class of '39.

Dear Girls—Not long ago, when we had been locked in for the night by our keepers in that guaranteed finishing school we attended, we were wont to exchange our girlish confidences. In our virginally white dormitory, which contained for that semester, approximately twelve lady bar-flies, fourteen arrested mental cases, three stool pigeons and one chronic complainer, I would announce, when I could be heard over the din—my intention of writing this book.

Although you were all too polite to comment, none of you believed me: some thought that I, true to alcoholic patient form, would be too busy drinking again, upon release. Others thought I would fear, or should fear, institutional retaliation. The rest followed the very sound insane asylum policy of believing nothing a patient there claimed, regardless if their comitment papers did announce them sane, if slightly pickled. Notwithstanding—you all agreed a book about the inside workings of a bughouse SHOULD *be written. So here it is—our little saga.*

When you've finished this book, you will think I've been too moderate. Definitely, I've "pulled my punches". You know, and I know, I could have delved into sundry hospital scandals and muck-raked generally. (How I would love to write up "sick bay's ghost"!) But I felt, in the interests of accuracy, I should write solely of such incidents where I had been on the scene and strictly ignore tales we heard of other wards.

Like men in trenches—we went through such tribulation together—we forged unbreakable bonds of friendship. No shipboard romances ours! I wonder where you all are now! Joe, the lanky darling, is probably putting up her kids' school lunches. And ironing! Letty is, no doubt, under some table, where, she insists, she sleeps the best. Alma is likely on her ranch, missing us, but not missing us to the extent of taking a P. G. course to meet us again. Margo is, I've heard, doing well at the studios, relying on coca-colas to revive her flagging interest in scripts.

Most of you, I fear, are ensconced in gay cocktail lounges, realizing, when you stop to think at all, that at any moment a parole officer may tap your shoulder and inform you, "Come in, gal—back to your Alma Mater to get your doctorate."

Wherever you are, my dears, in the words of our redoubtable Miss Seton, I salute you—"Good MORNING, *girls. Rise and* SHINE!"

"BILLIE" WILSON

THEY CALL THEM CAMISOLES

CHAPTER 1

We found ourselves, Virginia and I, in Hollywood's famed Laurel Canyon, attending a party for the Fourth Estate. A couple of newshawks had squired us, but we soon lost them in the melee. We didn't mind. We were having a grand reunion. Our respective mothers kept us apart whenever possible, for we made exceptionally capable drinking partners.

As the night wore thin, we saw the festivities were becoming a shade too Bacchanalian for our tastes, so we departed unobtrusively. The unobtrusiveness was deemed politic; we'd each expropriated a straw-wrapped bottle of Scotch.

It was far to the boulevard, but we made it. Once there we settled ourselves on the curb to await a bus. The very fact that we expected a bus on Hollywood Boulevard at that hour showed to what heights our alcoholic exuberance had soared.

All that hove to on our horizon was a dejected milkman and his equally dejected-looking horse. He drew rein and surveyed us critically.

"What you girls need," he announced at length, "is a nice cold drink of buttermilk."

"What we need," retorted Virginia, "is a nice warm ride home."

He looked at us, and he looked at the Scotch.

"Get aboard."

When he'd gotten his horse into high gear, we offered him a drink, although it was apparent even to our clouded perceptions that he'd already been imbibing freely. He seized the bottle and drank deeply—so deeply as to arouse our awe. We realized we were in the presence of a master. His endurance wasn't equal to his capacity, however, because before we'd traversed six blocks we heard a faint "clunk" and saw our benefactor had collapsed onto the bottles in the van. We looked at each other blankly.

"What shall we do now?" asked Virginia.

"Do?" I replied. "We'll drive this conveyance home."

"I wanna ride the horse!" she wailed.

"We'll take turns," I corrected her, coldly.

Thus it was that the infrequent boulevardiers abroad so early beheld a strange sight. I was frantically steering the by-now totally demoralized horse past Grauman's Chinese while Virginia rode, triumphantly not "pulling leather". We had quite a little altercation at Highland Avenue; she wanted to essay a touch of circus-rider technique. She compromised by trying to sell some butter to a group of baffled street-cleaners on Vine Street.

"I'm not adverse to picking up some small change should we encounter persons desirous of dairy wares," she articulated owlishly. She talks like that when she's blotto.

With a Ben Hur flourish we pulled up in front of her apartment on Van Ness Avenue. Gazing speculatively at the recumbent milkman, I at-

tempted a little something in the line of resuscitation. Plunging my thumb through a milk-bottle cap, I deluged him with the contents. He just sort of sneezed and turned over, resting his cheek blissfully on a dozen eggs. Virginia wrote "Thanks" with her lipstick on his shirt-front, and we started to enter the apartment. Halfway up the steps Virginia was struck with an appalling thought.

"Billie," she whispered, "I'm afraid Pegasus is cold."

"I'll bet he's hungry, too!" I replied, aghast.

"Good ol' Peg," she said, biting her lips to keep from crying, "Let's take him in with us."

We returned to the startled horse, who had not yet recovered his equanimity. We had a hell of a time trying to disrobe him. From his port side, Virginia was begging me for a pair of scissors, since she couldn't get his brassiere off. I couldn't help her—I was too busy wishing they put zippers on harness. We finally got him denuded save for a bertha-like effect about his neck, and led him toward the apartment. The horse looked very unhappy about the whole thing. Fortunately, Virginia lived on the ground floor, but the building must have been a jerry-built affair, for his hooves clopped hollowly and shook the whole house.

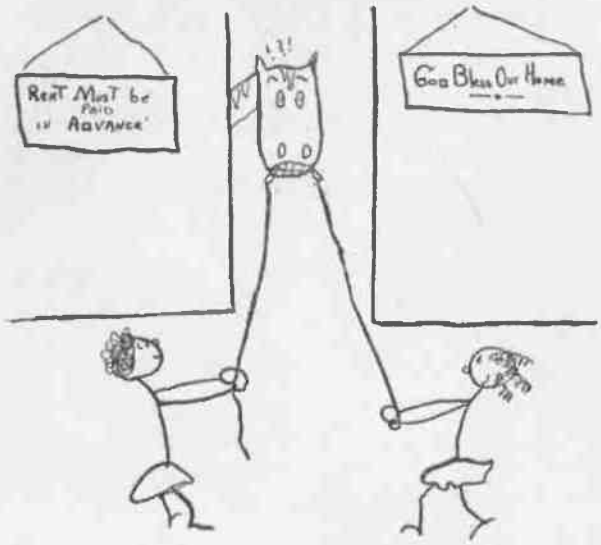
Just then the landlady appeared. She was clad in lots of curlers and no teeth. For some reason or other she was quite upset.

"You can't bring that animal in here!" she cried, unreasonably.

'There's no law against putting up a friend for the night," Virginia told her, equably.

"Keep calm—he's housebroke," I assured her. "He can sleep in the bath-tub."

The landlady seemed to be having the vapors. She was gasping something about "the police", but her enunciation was not of the best, sans bridgework. Virginia and I were having a little trouble with Pegasus. He must have heard rumours about strange apartments, with or without etchings, and he balked at Virginia's doorway. We both got at his head and tugged.



"Became inextricably wedged"

When he was halfway through the door he took a deep breath or something and became inextricably wedged. We heard the frenzied landlady at the hall 'phone, dialing. Virginia and I are old campaigners. We gave one another a

long, level look; no words were necessary. I flung up the window and slid out. Virginia had moved in that very night and her two bags were not unpacked. She locked them, and tossed them to me, hastily inventorying the room as she did so.

"How about this end-table?" she queried.

"It's a very nice end-table," I replied, politely. I knew it wasn't hers. It came hurtling through the window at me.

"I like the lampshade and the pastel, too," I advised her. These came out—with Virginia on the other end. We stole away, not resting until we reached the densely protective shadows of Paramount Studio, some three blocks away.

As far as we know, the horse is still there.

* * *

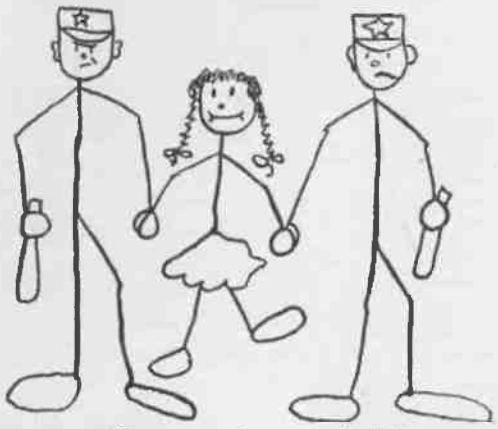
The years passed, bringing my chronological age to the point where sedateness is implied, but adolescent escapades like that involving the horse still occurred—and frequently enough to cause my harrassed mother, at long last, to take steps. But *what* steps! In the beginning, she had a lot of ideas, mostly bad. She first tried nauseous remedies in my coffee. The stomach that had welcomed rotgut thrived on them. She spent money she could ill afford getting her only child in and out of quack sanitariums where they indubitably shorten one's life-span by trying a series of "cures", from making one bulge with strong drink followed by drastic emetics—down to leeches.

As a last resort, mother tried a new high in specifics. She committed her sane, if irre-

sponsible daughter, to the—but let me tell it as it happened.

* * *

It *did* seem a bit on the rodent side for my mother to buy me beer with one hand, and beckon to the cops with the other. However, I went with the officers docilely enough. In



"I went along quietly"

fact, I beamed upon them; any friends of mother's are friends of mine.

Once, in the long drive across the city to Los Angeles' notorious Lincoln Heights jail, I spoke, asking the officers to stop at a drive-in stand to purchase some sandwiches. The driver appeared not to have heard. The cop in the back seat said, "Aw—let the poor kid eat."

But the car didn't stop until we reached the city jail. Inside I was eventually ushered into a small cell known as the drunk tank. A quilt-thin pad was spread on a low wooden shelf,

suspended from the wall by a chain; this was the bed. The beer had worn off, and left me in a deplorable condition. I pressed a hand against my heart and timidly informed the matron that I felt faint. She eyed me wearily. This, clearly, was an oft-heard plaint. She did, however, spread a second pad on the floor. Thus, if I did faint, the skull-fracturing hazard was reduced.

Next morning I was placed in a large tank containing a motley crew of civic offenders. I held my throbbing head and leaned against a wall while I received the customary booking-slip.

"Wilma Wilson," it read, and stated my address, occupation, and place of arrest. "Age 29, height 5-7, weight 130, sex female, birthplace, Los Angeles, nationality American." Then followed some cryptic notations which I studied uncomprehendingly.

"What does this mean, do you know?" I asked one of the old hands in the tank.

"It means 'plain drunk'," she told me, languidly. This stirred me from my misery.

"That's not true," I protested hotly. "I was not plain drunk—I was stupendously drunk.

And then, Court.

When the judge asked me if I had anything to say in my behalf, I told him the truth—that I'd been working too long hours, holding down two jobs, that a broken front tooth necessitated a lay-off for dental repairs. I'd started drinking, and this, augmented by novocaine and sedatives, brought me before him.

The judge studied me. While I was not at

my best after a night in jail, and no glamour-girl at any time, still, I was not like one of his run-of-the-jail customers. He started to speak, but I shall never know his intention. A woman rose in the courtroom and received permission to speak.

"I'm her mother", she said. "Im afraid my daughter has become a confirmed alcoholic. I would like to have her committed to the psychopathic ward for observation."

"Granted," said the judge. "Observation to begin immediately. And sixty days."

With my world crashing about me, I entered a madhouse.

* * *

CHAPTER II

The quill of a Dante might accurately depict the horrors about me. In a daze I allowed myself to be divested of my personal clothing, and garbed in the shapeless drab of the Los Angeles General Hospital Prison Ward. With fear and dismay I studied the other patients, all so maniacal I wondered at the attendants' composure.

Once seated in the midst of these poor demented, a still more horrible thought shook me.

"These people," I whispered, "think they are sane—I think *I'm* sane—Oh *God!*"

I didn't know then that my warrant read "addiction to stimulants" and theirs—"insanity". It was life's hardest blow to me.

While I was eyeing the mental patients warily, a young woman walked up to me and, as a passport to fellowship, showed me her commitment paper. She told me that her name was Peggy and that she, too, was charged with intemperance. In the five days that followed we were seldom out of one another's sight.

"I know just how you feel," Peggy assured me. "I was the only alcoholic here for three days, and how I stayed sane, I'll never know!"

She had already been arraigned, which explained her having the papers, but because she was an indigent, they were holding her while social workers decided whether she should stay in California with her husband, on relief, or if she should be deported to her parents in the middle-West.

We quickly fell into a routine. We helped the attendants feed recalcitrant patients, ran errands about the ward, made beds—in short—became oriented. We managed to see the funny side of things, and undeniably, funny sights abounded. One of our diversions was to hang unobtrusively around the desk and hear the histories of incoming patients when they were admitted.

We were there when two burly deputies brought in a little nurse, her cheeks flaming to the color of her scarlet-lined nurse's cape. She was so patently sane, and in such an agony of humiliation (she'd received part of her training on this very floor) that she gained our immediate sympathy.

She had left her husband, an ill-tempered man many years older—and he'd gone to her home and over her mother's frantic protests, burned her entire wardrobe in the incinerator. Then this tender gent had sworn out a psychopathic warrant against the girl. Manlike, he'd figured any woman who'd leave *him* must be crazy. The deputies had removed her, to her chagrin, from a surgical case at a local hospital. I don't think this girl's sanity was ever questioned at the psychopathic ward, but according to law she had to spend her five days under observation.

My fellow-drunk and I gave Rose, the nurse, her allotted time for panic and tears to subside, then we became a trio.

Because Rose had taken part of her training here, her embarrassment upon meeting colleagues was searing. She must have been a very competent nurse, since she'd been supervisor and an anesthetist. She was a most wholesome specimen of womanhood. Her skin was sun-golden, her cheeks glowed and her eyes had that faint tinge of blue usually lost early in childhood. Her hair curled crisply, her whole person exuded cleanliness; best of all, she had a sense of humour second to none. (Not to mention an ample supply of cigarettes, which endeared her to us immediately.)

We knew we were fortunate to have each other's company in this ordeal, and when one or the other gave way to the ever-lurking despondency, the others braced the failing one.

A phase of our hospitalization we particularly resented was the indifferent disdain a patient received regardless of cause of commitment. There is nothing personal in this. The employees hear a dozen meaningless complaints per minute, so that when a person has a legitimate want, or asks a civil question, the employee usually responds with a "Run along, now" or "Don't bother me". My worst difficulty in this was about a minor ailment. My mouth was swollen and raw with fever blisters. I tried again and again to beg some unguent for them. With the utmost courtesy, I asked nurses and attendants and even doctors. Such beautiful buck-passing! Such a neat run around! Each referred me to yet another. The payoff came on the

fifth day when my mouth looked very bad to take to court. At my complaint, the head nurse told me reproachfully that I should have had it attended to sooner, that I shouldn't expect it to heal miraculously with a few hours' treatment!

This cavalier attitude was extremely galling to Rose, used to the other side of the fence. She told us the experience would be invaluable to her in future dealings with her patients.

"If," she added hastily, "I ever have any more patients!"

Of course, not all of the staff at "Psycho" showed this coolness. Some of the nurses were darlings, and as for Miss Wayne, head attendant, I never heard anyone mention her but to bless her. To all of the unfortunates in her care, sick in mind and body, many of them vicious, unpleasant and dangerous, she was gentle and considerate.

At each end of the ward there were large, screened sun-porches, furnished with deck-chairs and glider-swings. We spent most of our time in the one supposedly reserved for the "disturbed" patients, for it was invariably tenantless. "Disturbed" is the euphemism applied to a mental patient in the throes of anything — temper, gaiety, sulks or jitters. If the patients became too disturbed, they were tied in bed, leaving their porch pleasantly free. Here the three of us often went to sun ourselves, gossip and plan stratagems for freedom. We had found a deck of cards and were regretting the lack of a fourth for bridge when we heard a commotion in the hall that signified a new arrival. I promised to reconnoiter. My

investigation at the desk showed a rather attractive young woman calmly giving information concerning herself. Her coat bore a Magnin label. I studied her bag, gloves, magazines. The last had heretofore been a sure character gauge for me. Returning excitedly to the girls, I exclaimed, "This new customer must be all right—she's reading Vogue and the New Yorker."

When next I saw our newcomer, she wore leather handcuffs and was rolling on the floor, laughing idiotically. The girls ribbed me unmercifully upon my character appraising, and told the nurses how I had judged her by her taste in literature.

"That's nothing," the nurse shrugged, "the last time she was up here, she was reading *Anthony Adverse!*"

This same patient attacked me a day later. Her fingernails raked down my arm and she was about to sink a fang or two in me when Rose advanced on her, smiling, palm outstreched. As Rose closed in, she suddenly bopped the frenzied patient on the chin, tripping her with one foot at the same time. Rose was much smaller than either of us, but she'd been trained for these eventualities. I had been too scared to defend myself. Rose later told me she'd often escorted mental patients to and from prisons and hospitals, and it was routine stuff to her.

Another afternoon, a very young girl had an epileptic seizure in our presence. Although it is the law that a graduate nurse must be on the floor there at all times, we couldn't find one—not even an undergraduate. All the attendants

as well were at the far end of the building. Rapidly Rose wrapped a pencil in a paper cup and thrust it in the child's mouth to prevent her from swallowing or biting her tongue, and then held her by a queer arm-hold that supported her safely and comfortably. The child recovered.

When we had our Wassermann tests, Rose asked if hers might be self-administered, because she knew it to be difficult to find her vein. This was not allowed, and she had to suffer three bunglings. The nurse finally admitted defeat and sent for the doctor to take the specimen.

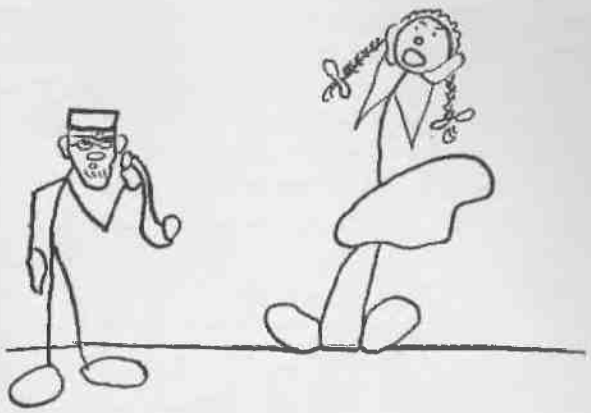
We'd been given physical examinations on arrival. Now we were to have our mental examination. I almost swooned when I saw the head psychiatrist. He was a gnome-like old man, wearing a rabbi-type black skullcap. Being utterly deaf he carried to his ear a singular contrivance that looked like a misplaced meerschaum.

It's a sickening feeling to know that your mental status, reputation and freedom all depend on an ancient little man who can't hear a word of your explanations or pleadings. I said as much to the nurse.

"Don't worry," she laughed, "he's forgotten more than most young doctors will ever know. He can tell more from your hands, eyes and bearing than another could in a month of conversation."

I wasn't too reassured, however. Nor did his questions allay my lack of confidence.

"How's your sex life?" he asked. I knew he couldn't hear my answer, and I also knew we



"How's your sex life?"

had an entranced audience consisting of Peggy and Rose. Averting my head so that he couldn't read my lips—I replied,

"Fine, Doc. How's yours?"

Next he asked if I knew where I was. I was about to tell him, but he seldom waited for an answer. Then he asked me what year it was.

"For heaven's sake," advised Rose in a stage whisper, "tell the poor guy what year it is—he's asking everybody!"

Now he wanted to know if I heard things and saw things. When I nodded affirmatively, he hitched forward eagerly.

"I hear you when you speak—" I told him, "and I see the traffic going by from the window."

Never do I hope to see a more crestfallen countenance.

It was with this inauspicious preparation I faced Judge Munsey in the Psychopathic Court.

All the doctors and nurses were there, as well as some people of unexplained import. Mother was there, of course. My chart was studied. The little psychiatrist conferred with the diminutive judge. I expected the worst and felt as Alice did about the pack of cards.

Then the doctor delivered a mild eulogy, and I finally realized with the utmost astonishment that he was speaking of me.

"This patient, Your Honor," he was saying, "seems to be a very fine girl. She is intelligent, pleasant, and has been completely cooperative with the doctors and nurses. Her morals are unquestioned, and the only thing we can say against her is that she showed some fear of the other patients, which is, I suppose, understandable. We feel that Wilma's salvation is to return to work at once."

All this from the little medico I had felt to be lacking in perception because of his deafness! I was too stunned to move.

"Will you promise not to drink again, Wilma?" asked judge Munsey, kindly. Mother was on her feet, protesting. She insisted that I be sent to the state mental hospital for its vaunted liquor cure. The judge silenced her rather sharply.

I promised not to drink.

"That's fine," he said, "I don't want to see you in here again unless it is to tell me you are all right."

When I told him I had sixty days in Lincoln Heights facing me, he said he'd have it set aside. He paroled me to mother for one year. Again she tried to persuade him to commit me,

and failing, left the courtroom in something of a huff.

A whirlwind of joy, I returned upstairs to be discharged. Peggy had been sentenced to a month in a rest home. Rose, still untried, was disconsolate at our leaving.

When I got downstairs again, however, I found that inasmuch as mother had refused to take me home, I was to be returned to jail.

The matron didn't want to admit me because she had no "papers" on me. They couldn't, legally, just turn me loose, so I was jailed though not booked, a forgotten prisoner. When friends and relatives tried to visit me they were told that since I wasn't on the book I must have returned to Psycho.

Every minute of this Jean Valjean episode of my life is unforgettable. I was placed on the kitchen detail and daily had a full day's work done by eight A.M. Everything claimed of the food at Lincoln Heights Jail is true. The reek of that thrice-daily slop known as "stew" is with me yet. The heartiest laugh I've had in recent months was when the newspapers announced that our new mayor had paid a "surprise" visit to the jail and pronounced the food "excellent". If he got the regulation fare he's an Ananias or his olfactory equipment and taste-buds need overhauling.

Thievery was rampant in the clink, but this phenomenon should not have astonished me. I learned through bitter experience to pin a tobacco sack containing my money inside my nightie, and to wear my stockings to bed. One feature of jail existence never failed to amaze me, and that was the nonchalance with which

the habitues received their incarceration, and the way they greeted one another. Daily one could hear,

"Yoohoo, Maisie, when did you come back?"

"Yesterday, Kid."

"What did you get?"

"Hunderd and eighty days. What about you?"

"They gave me the works this time—y'a seen Flossie lately?"

"No, but we'll be seein' her soon."

The judge who'd sentenced me had gone on a month's vacation, leaving no forwarding address. I was desperate. I had always been under the impression a person couldn't, by law, be paroled and serving sentence simultaneously. I was like the poor guy who screamed from behind the bars, "You can't put me in jail!"

The days dragged by. I listened to sordid tales and obscene anecdotes until revulsion overwhelmed me. The remarks overheard! One girl said,

"I don't know anything about L. A. jails—I allus git pinched in Pedro."

Then there was the old slattern who remarked wistfully, when someone mentioned Scandinavians,

"I had a Swede oncet. He was the one who uster beat hell outa me every night."

A few women of higher order languished in our bastille. We had with us a bona fide Russian princess, and a world renowned authoress. They were booked under assumed names, of course. Why is it always "assumed name" for the average citizen, but "alias" for the dubious?

I also want to know why there was not a set

penalty for drinking and other misdemeanors? On one day a judge would sentence every drunk five days or twenty-five dollars. At the next session, the same judge would give every drunk thirty days—no fine.

Jailed at this time was a gracious, cultured woman of quiet charm. She was manager of an exclusive apartment hotel. She and her husband drank several highballs at a card party, returning home at two in the morning. While he was putting their car up, she decided to walk around the block before retiring. Her route led past a dance club, outside of which two cops in a prowl car were watching the patrons disperse. The officers wondered at seeing an unescorted woman at that hour, questioned her, smelled liquor, and took her to jail. Next morning a judge gave her thirty days while her frenzied husband and sympathetic employer tried every means to get her out, unavailingly, for she'd been given no alternative fine. She worried a great deal about her high-school age children at home without supervision. It's all right for the righteous to say smugly that she should never have taken a drink, but this could have happened to you, or you, or you.

Nights at "Psycho" had been so fear-ridden that Peggy, Rose, and I had posted night-watches. Now, in jail, the insomnia persisted. Each stealthy footfall at night, and there were many, brought me upright on the iron bunk in a lather of terror.

I became very fond of the young woman who slept in the next bunk. She was extremely literate and we talked lengthily of books, psychology, metaphysics and on a host of topics. She had

been jailed on a larceny charge of which she was later acquitted. She'd been married but a few weeks to a young actor who idolized her, and who spent the greater part of each day standing across from the jail and making signs at her.

One afternoon she questioned me about my sojourn in Honolulu. She wanted to know if there was much miscegenation in the islands.

"No," I laughed. "Of course, a handful of cheap women will marry Filipinos, but the practice isn't widespread."

A peroxide blonde on the other side of the tank reared up on one elbow, giving me a menacing glare.

"Lissen, you," she called, "*I'm* married to a Filipino, and *I* ain't no cheap woman!"

As this blonde was my "boss" in the dining-room, I discreetly changed the subject.

My new-found pal, Marian, and I decided to attend divine services one Sunday afternoon. We felt we should get our money's worth of jail.

"Church" was held in the dining-room, and was in the capable hands of four young and wholesome girls sent by the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Although I was prejudicedly alert for signs of patronage or sanctimoniousness on the part of these youngsters, I must confess I could see nothing in their attitude toward the prisoners but sweet helpfulness. There were hymns, of course, and messages of cheer, and then—and then—the sermon.

In jail, when one is about to be freed, the matron calls your name, and instructs you to bring your "bed". These glad tidings invariably

mean you are freed and your blankets are turned in to the laundry.

Small wonder, then, that our levity got out of bounds when these zealous girl evangelists preached long and ardently, reiterating, "Take up thy bed and walk!"

Services were stopped while the girl in charge turned reproachful eyes on us, and remarked sadly that she saw nothing funny. We honestly wanted to apologize and explain, but couldn't. We were laughing too hard. Our fellow-felons were ashamed of us, and we slunk out of the dining-hall in high disgrace.

Marion's husband at last contrived her release. She was delirious with joy as she embraced me. The next morning I received a special delivery letter from her, containing a dollar bill. She had written within an hour of reaching home. The money was sent because she knew so well how much it means when imprisoned. For one thing, it buys onions with which you can drown out the taste of the stew. The matrons have a neat little racket of overcharging the women—five cents for an onion, five cents for a doughnut, ten cents for about two tablespoonsful of cold cream. If one protests, they shrug and reply truthfully enough that they are not compelled to offer any of these things for sale.

Sound advice to anyone who hears of a friend in jail, at least in this one, is to mail them money at once. Bringing food and cigarettes does no good, as everything must be bought in the jail. *But* if you have a little bribe-money on you, you get along much better. We often had to give the girl in charge of uniforms a dime or two

to insure having a clean uniform approximately the right size on bath day! Mother sent me several dollars, and I attribute my eventual release directly to it. It happened like this:

I remembered a woman judge whom my family knew casually. I found a very dilapidated telephone-book in the tank. Fortunately, this judge's name appeared on one of the pages still present and intact. I bought, at an exhorbitant price, some stationery, and wrote the judge of my plight, begging her to attempt some revision of the case in the sentencing judge's absence. I'd already been imprisoned seventeen nightmarish days. I marked the letter special delivery, and for a quarter bought ten cents' worth of stamps. I gave a trusty fifty cents and asked her to try and smuggle the letter out before the accustomed mail time the next day. Telling myself I was an incorrigble sucker, I returned to my bunk. Certainly I expected the girl to promise, pocket the coin, and mail the letter with the regular mail. Mirabile dictu, she was square. There was a friendly matron on duty that night who read the letter, and knew that this judge was on the bench downstairs that very moment. She also knew the judge was leaving the next day on her vacation so she went right down in the elevator, and gave the letter into court. Within forty minutes my name was called, and I appeared in night-court.

Night court in L. A. is quite a public institution. Possibly because a local reporter makes a highly readable daily column from these night cases, the citizens have made a fad of spending an evening there, watching the unfortunates pass in review. Therefore I faced a positive

battery of morbid, if blank gazes. Nearly all the "audience" appeared to be chewing gum in soothing unison. The judge was much more beautiful to my gaze. She smiled at me graciously, saying,

"I have taken your case for review, Wilma. Sentence suspended."

Grateful tears filled my eyes when I thanked her. As the matron and I rode upstairs, I questioned her.

"Does this mean I am free to go unguarded—no one has to meet me?"

"You will be turned loose alone in the morning," she assured me. "Don't come back."

I had no intention of continuing my depredations.

"You might get me back for arson and you might get me back for rape," I responded fervently, "but you'll never get me back again for drinking."

Several others were released at the same time next day. One, a very pretty young woman arrested for drunkenness roused my pity. Knowing she had no place to go, I invited her to come home with me. She accepted gratefully. We followed the established procedure of crossing the street and waving to the envious inmates on the fifth floor of the jail, then caught a street-car. As the street-car turned down Broadway, we were astonished to see vast crowds lining the curbs, and to sense a holiday spirit in the air.

"You don't suppose it could be for us?" ventured Sally. A few minutes later some newsboys' headlines explained. President Roosevelt was in town, and our street-car was barely getting under the wire before the block was closed

to traffic. Eager to reach home and bathtub, we didn't wait to see the great man.

When we arrived home, real coffee and toast were ambrosial. Unfortunately, the chef of Lincoln Heights had been of the saltpetre and chicory school of thought.

We bathed, then Sally went storewards to purchase cigarettes. Minutes became hours, and I was afraid that she'd become lost or been injured. Two and one-half hours later she returned, accompanied by three men, all four of them thoroughly rum-dum. She and I parted company then, with entire amity on both sides. I couldn't afford her company if she'd be so apt to jeopardize my suspended sentence, and she found me too conservative.

Mother came home then, and we had a long talk. I explained it was too unkind to send a sane person among lunatics, because there was an actual, if remote danger of the person becoming himself unbalanced. Even attendants in such places occasionally slip their cerebral cogs.

Mother had not been exactly a help throughout the whole incarceration, although I know she meant well. She had called Psycho so frequently to inquire whether I had slept well, and what I had eaten, if anything, that it led to embarrassment for me. I was standing near the Psycho telephone one day, unnoticed by the nurse, when one such call came. With commendable restraint, the nurse answered mother's anxious queries civilly, and at equal length. But when she had hung up, she turned with dangerous quietude to another nurse and muttered bitterly,

"What does that dame want us to do—issue

bulletins on Wilson's condition?"

It should be conceded here that mother had ample justification for all this. In the years that followed the episode of the unfortunate horse, I had become a dipsomaniac, also known as "spree-drinker" and "periodic alcoholic". By whatever name this affliction is known, it is a curse. I fought it, and suceeded in reducing my sprees from monthly bouts to one in every three months, then to five months, and, at this time, they were occurring not oftener than twice a year—generally every eight or nine months.

On the binge preceding my commitment, I had been drinking for about a week, intermittently visiting the dentist. At the end of the week mother asked a woman physician with a nearby clinic to put me up for two nights, and snap me out of it. The doctor put me in a rear bedroom with a nurse. The first night the nurse gave me three fingers of bourbon and a hypodermic. The second night she gave me a bottle of beer and a sedative. All would have been fine if I hadn't had the jitters. When the sedative didn't immediately relieve my misery, I seized an opportunity to rummage in my purse while the nurse was out of the room. I found the bottle of patent medicine I was seeking, some common remedy costing fifty cents for twelve tablets of almost ineffectual sleeping medicine. I swallowed the six remaining pills.

My boss had been urging me to return to work, and I rose after my second night at the doctor's looking deceptively steady while I bade my nurse goodbye. I telephoned my boss at once, but can't remember precisely from where —although I'd been forty-eight hours with just

two small drinks! I do recall clearly, however, my boss's voice as he told me regretfully that my place had been filled until the following Thursday.

This disappointment evidently caused me to start drinking again, because it was at nine that night was arrested in our neighborhood beer garden. But truthfully I have no memory of taking the first drink nor subsequent ones on that day. If such foolishness as taking an overdose of numbing medicine can be held in extenuation, I plead innocence of deliberate misconduct at the time.

No one was at fault save myself. Certainly not the doctor, a competent, ethical woman who gave me nothing but legitimate dosage. Nor the nurse, who naturally didn't expect an apparently sensible young woman to act so stupidly, and above all, not my mother, whose patience was exhausted.

Although this fateful date is a blank in my mind, I can reconstruct fairly clearly my movements then. My credit is entirely too good in my home neighborhood. It's a semi-annual occurrence for me to say "All right, George, what's the bad news?" And George, our barkeep. will ransack the register and toss my bundle of chits to me. Sometimes I look through them.

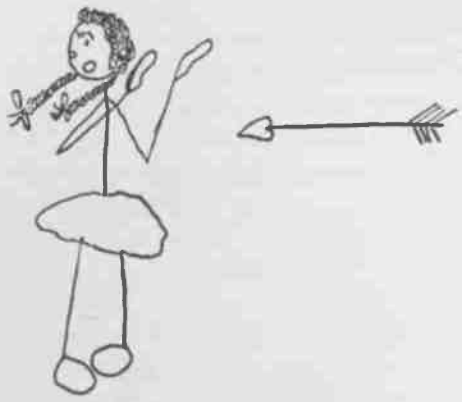
"Now, George, you're not going to tell me I ordered seven *Coca-Colas* while on the last speed run?" George will grin amiably and ask me if I don't remember setting them up for the Salvation Army Band that invaded his place one afternoon. Also, I'd pretend to be incredulous if ever I saw an item reading "spaghetti".

"George," I'd snort, "that's sheer libel! You can't tell me I'd *ever* get drunk enough to eat that glutinous mass of protoplasm you shove at misguided customers who are unwary enough to order any of your cooking." But I'd always pay. After all, anyone's word was better than mine as to what I owed.

So it is plain I blamed no one but myself. In one thing, however, I felt mother could have been more discreet. She had done most of her telephoning to ascertain my progress from her office.

"Oh Mama," I wailed, "why did you phone from *there?* Now your whole staff knows I was in the psychopathic ward!"

"That's all right, Baby," she soothed me. "I didn't tell them you'd been drunk. I told them you'd merely had a little mental breakdown!"



CHAPTER III

As if going through the psychopathic ward and jail wasn't enough turmoil for one year, I'd not been out a month when I met Ricky and fell suddenly, devastatingly in love!

He did, too.

The next eight months were spent in an ecstatic daze, and I went daily to work in a golden fog. I hadn't felt such lightheartedness since my nineteenth year.

There were several obstacles to our immediate marriage. By consulting calendars, budgets, and tea-leaves, we figured we'd be able to marry the following April.

Possibly loneliness had been instrumental in bringing on the bitter moods and restlessness which preceded my occasional drinking bouts.

Regardless, I now felt at peace with this "best of all possible worlds", and had no urge whatever to drink.

I had told Ricky all about my lurid career and he had appeared thunderstruck.

"Do you enjoy drinking?" he wanted to know.

"Only the first night," I explained. 'The eight or nine succeeding days are just dogged guzzling to stave off the sickness, or put out the fire or something. It's like having a lion by the tail—one daren't let go."

"Sure sounds like fun," he commented drily.

He told me point blank he could never tolerate it. This was a refreshing change from my ex-husband, who had sworn by the sun, moon, and stars that he could cope with any idiosyncracies on my part if I'd just say "yes".

Naturally, all this set me pondering. Was I sailing under false colors? Telling him of my problem was very different from the actuality. I felt strangely confident I could make us both happy if I succeeded in abstinence—but did I have the right to jeopardize our future as long as there was a chance, however remote, of backsliding on my part?

After the eight months I mentioned so pridefully, circumstances made the answer plain. Too plain.

We had spent the evening at a bar with some friends. I'd drunk nothing but Coca-Colas and had had those beyond the point of satiety. I'd been refusing high-balls every fifteen seconds with automaton regularity to the bibulously persistent couple with us. Shortly after midnight, I wearied of arguing.

"Look—" I asked the girl, "if I take one beer

will you stop pestering me?" She agreed, and asked the bartender for a nickel beer. I drank it, and we continued our desultory conversation.

The reason I gave the drink no special thought was because from time to time in my tippling career, I'd had beer without it leading on to a bender. At this time I felt doubly safe, because my general attitude was serene and not at all indicative of a danger period.

In this Ricky does not concur. He maintains he had sensed instability in my mood for several weeks. It is an argument never to be settled, for on this evening when I chanced to turn his way I was startled to discover him white with fury.

"You've broken your word to me and to the judge," he said angrily.

"That's absurd," I returned, dismayed. "You know the judge wouldn't make an issue of a nickel beer! What he wants, what everyone who knows me wants, is for me never again to become intoxicated. For a drinker of my type to take one and no more, is a moral victory. It should be considered a feather in my cap."

"Ah!" he snorted disgustedly. "Rationalizing!" He threw some money on the bar and told the bartender he might as well fill me up. I gave him a very long, very dirty look, and fell to drinking in earnest.

This starting to drink, of course, was an open invitation to trouble. I was still under a year's parole not to drink, and all that now stood between me and the booby-hatch was a telephone call. My only chance was that no one would be stern enough to notify the psychopathic board.

The next five or six days are not quite clear.

But the seventh day is. I repaired to my equivalent of a Turkish bath—one of those irrigating and back-slapping outfits known as a chiropractic hospital. The doctor who ran it was a family friend, and she agreed to put me up for the night. But it seemed I'd barely fallen asleep when I heard a gruff "Wake up!" I think before I opened my paining eyes I knew.

There stood two unyielding deputy sheriffs.

* *

That afternoon in the psychopathic ward a jolly nurse walked up to two girls who were very disconsolate and very ill. She gazed on them with amused pity.

"Why don't you two," she suggested, "go into that end room on the right? One of your pals is there, and she's in a bad way."

"Do you mean," moaned the first girl, "that there's another poor drunk roped in?"

"I mean just that," the nurse told her cheerily, "and something tells me you three will see a lot of each other!" With this ominous statement she returned to her work.

In this way I met Letty and Elise. Letty was the wife of a well-known aviator who supplied most of the cleverer flight shots in motion pictures. She was twenty-six years old, and pretty in a lush brunette way. She had poise and a certain wry humor that made her an acceptable comrade in such distress. She'd already had her trial and received the bad news—Camarillo State Hospital and the liquor cure.

"You'll be along," she jeered, upon learning I was a parole violator. "I'll keep a light burning in the window for you." Shortly thereafter she was borne away by a couple of purposeful

looking guys in uniform.

Knowing I was sunk, I waived arraignment. I didn't want to go through that humiliation again.

Elise and I went to trial together. This time mother didn't tell the court; the court told her —Camarillo.

Elise received the same judgment. Poor little girl. Frail, gentle and lovely, she was like a fawn in a trap. And she fought as pitifully and futilely. Later I got her story from her. Although she was but twenty-four, she had held the same job of chocolate-dipper for eight years and supported her entire family—five of them. She had drunk nearly every night. One day she quarreled with her boss, quit her job, and within the week she found herself committed by her family.

"Did you tell the judge any of this?" I asked.

"Why, no," she said, in surprise. "Should I have?"

Elise's physical state frightened me. She seemed in actual danger of complete collapse, physical and mental. Fright and weakness sent such violent shudders through her slight frame it was necessary to support her to keep her from falling at times.

We hid in an empty room to be as much away from the demented patients as possible. Of course we cried, and reproached ourselves for our stupidity. Being obviously the stronger, and being so sincerely concerned over this girl kept me from brooding too much then. We decided to appeal to one of the doctors there for some hint of what we must face. The place was always over-run with doctors, many of them

interestingly young and handsome. Fortunately for them, the gals that wind up in this ward are always too ill to do much in the line of intrigue.

When I asked Dr. Stoddard if he'd step into our room and answer some questions for us, he told us he'd be glad too. He smiled at our forlorn attitude.

"Now, girls—it's surely not that bad!"

Added lachrymal display from us.

"How long will they keep us, Doctor?"

"That, of course, depends on you—your individual need and recovery. You'll like it at Camarillo; it's a beautiful place. It will be like living on a big farm."

"What about clothes—can we wear our own?"

"I think you may wear your own or perhaps state clothes. I don't remember."

"Visitors?"

"All you want, every day."

"Will we have to work?"

"I think they'll let you help a little to pass time. I imagine you'll want to. You need this hospitalization, young lady!" he told Elise, holding her trembling wrist. He then turned to me, his face reflective. "I still feel *you* should not go, Wilma—but there was no alternative on that broken parole."

Still resentful of the cost in time and salary, I asked him if there were means of earning money there.

"I can't say, but probably the Occupational Therapy will teach you to make things to sell."

This made me wince, as I seem to be congenitally clumsy-fingered. I almost didn't get promoted from the second grade because of my inability to weave a little red hammock.

"Are the alcoholic and mental patients segregated?"

"I believe they are—at least that is the intention as soon as the institution is in good running order. As it's but two or three years old it's still in the process of being organized."

"You'll meet some very fine people," the doctor smiled, "there are a great many cultured, wealthy patients at Camarillo. A lot of rich men's sons have signed themselves in to be cured of drinking."

When he left us we thanked him. He went to order a sedative for the sick, bewildered youngster sobbing on the bed.

Mother had told me after court to expect Ricky at two—the visiting hour. Everyone knows how weighted a clock's hands are when one is suffering. At five minutes of two, I heard my name called. Brightening at the thought of company I ran to the desk.

"You are lucky, Wilma," beamed the nurse, "you are leaving at once for Camarillo. There is an unexpected trip being made, with room for one more passenger. We are giving you the chance, as best patient."

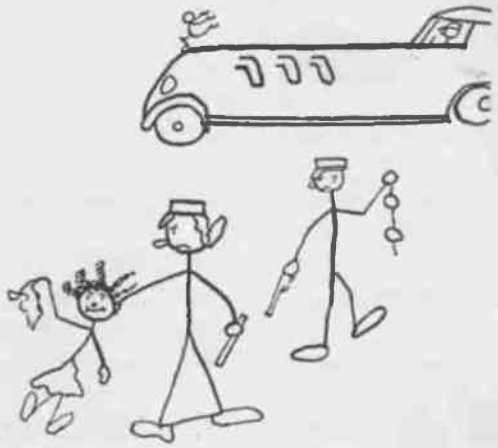
In vain did I try to present this dubious favor to Elise.

I went.

No one can deny that if you go nuts in California, you go first class. A gleaming Cadillac was at the door. So were two hefty deputies and an equally hefty lady deputy. It appeared I was to ride in the rear seat with two men maniacs. The uniformed driver and Lady Bull rode in the front seat. The other deputy, a personable redheaded boy in plain clothes, sat in

a jump seat in front of me. First, however, he laid an assortment of leather handcuffs and straps on the floor of the car, in the interesting event any or all of us chanced to become violent.

The first incident of the drive was our cop chauffeur getting himself lost in Los Angeles. After winding through a maze of railroad tracks and turning farther from the desired highway, the two lunatics and I directed him through Roscoe and at last to Ventura Boulevard.



"When you go nuts in California, you go First Class"

The men patients proved to be querulous and boring. They quarreled monotonously the entire trip, interrupting themselves only to bum cigarettes from me. One, a self-styled Communist, spoke as if he were a Bible salesman. I was too ill to be interested in this paradox.

The driver hit a frightening rate of speed. Once he had to make such a sudden stop was thrown violently against the jump seat ahead, tearing the knee out of my last pair of chiffon hose. At my cry of dismay, the red headed officer turned around and muttered a perfunctory, "Sorry."

As the car topped Conejo Grade, the floor of the valley below us was enchantingly beautiful. It made me, at least, temporarily forget misery.

As the asylum loomed into view, I asked the officers the questions I had neglected to put to Doctor Stoddard. They answered in an even more favorable vein. The doctor had tried, I'm sure, to give carefully honest answers, but these officers indulged in some sly fun at my expense. They found me beautifully gullible. The redhead drew a fascinating picture of life in pastoral surroundings—horseback, golf and swimming—laughter and leisure.

"There's not a key on the place," he assured me. "There's nothing to prevent you from running away. If you do, though, it becomes a felony. Then you're eligible for the penitentiary."

"Naw," interpolated the driver, "the gas chamber."

"You'll be climbing all through these hills becoming brown as a berry."

"What's the shortest length of time an alcoholic has been kept?" I inquired.

"I know one girl stayed only three months," the woman contributed helpfully.

Three months! I was speechless.

We passed truckloads of patients who had been out tilling the fields. I noted with abstract

interest that the hospital's remoteness from the main highway, which lay several miles behind us, should constitute quite an obstacle for those plotting escape, but I learned later escapes are a common occurrence. Just as common, however, is the escapee's reapprehension before he gets very far. The driver swooped at the main entrance and made a smart stop.

There was no turning back and I stared at the buildings fearfully. To my architecturally untaught eyes it appeared to be an omelette predominantly Spanish. For the most part, it was that sprawling white stucco, red-tiled, so dear to Californian hearts. But here and there were what appeared to be Turkish mosques and Byzantine domes. Later I was to discover there, Gothic arches, Florentine grill work, and Venetian blinds. Oh, well. Maybe the architect was a patient working out his board.

The woman flatfoot led me inside an attractive foyer. While she gave my name at the desk, I stepped to the door that looked out into a radiant patio. Presently there was a loud jangling, and a young nurse came for me. She should have been bowed under the weight of keys at her belt. At least two of them were huge enough to be "keys to the city".

CHAPTER IV

She unlocked a door about as flimsy as one to a sub-treasury vault, and we passed into what she explained was "sick bay". We paused at the sick bay office, where she turned in my overnight case for frisking.

A bath, she explained, was next in order. Down the long dim corridors we went, passing doors interestingly labeled "Secretary", "X-Ray", "Utility", "Diet Kitchen", "Dental Clinic", "Surgery", and—at last—"Hydro".

"Hydro proved to be a large shower room, equipped with two stall showers, two long work tables and a vast tub complete with strange canvas devices for giving the therapeutic "continuous" baths. From the cavernous depths of this tub a heavily swathed patient cocked a sardonic eye at me. It was as though I exchanged a high-sign with a mummy in a sarcophagus.

Also in the room was a pleasant little mental patient who was detailed to work there, and a nurse. While I disrobed the latter questioned me, writing my answers in a ledger. Name — address — age — description then came the perennial argument as to the color of my hair.

Having learned long ago that no one pays any attention as to what suggestions I advance as to its shade, I kept silent. I have heard it described in all the gaudier hues—titian, auburn, bronze, copper, on down to carrots, brick-top and pink. I no longer show resentment except when it is occasionally pronounced blonde. The nurse gave up and wrote it down as plain red.

By this time I was playing very happily with some scales. As we've none at home, I never get an opportunity to weigh myself undressed, and I was making the most of this chance. Then she asked my religion.

"Pagan," I threw over my shoulder, absently.

"Huh?" said the nurse, blankly.

The patient-assistant spoke for the first time.

"She means no religion," she explained to the nurse laconically, with overt contempt for her obtuseness.

The shower was unlike any I have ever seen. Sprays angled in all directions from the walls. In order to protect my hair, I assumed a pretzel-like posture and started to bathe.

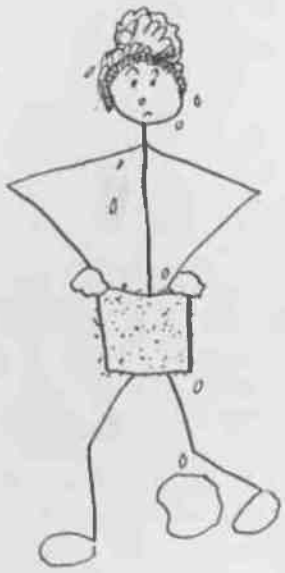
"Why are you sticking your head out like that?" asked the nurse, staring. I stared back.

"So my hair won't get wet," I explained, politely.

"Never you mind," she said. "You shampoo yourself—rules."

So though it was dusk, and I have very long hair, and there was no dryer, I dunked myself completely. When the patient, whose name was Gloria, handed me a towel, I stood looking at it stupidly. No one could ever have guessed it was a bath towel. It was about the size and shape of a man's hankie, and was sadly in need

of some tonsoril attention. However, during my long stay there, we never had any other towels than those small, greyish, exceedingly hairy squares.



"No one could guess it was a towel"

The next event on the program I missed. But I heard about it from other patients. I should have been stretched out on a table while the nurse got impertinent with a magnifying glass, seeking inhabitants. When other patients told me what I'd escaped, I felt vaguely flattered. My pristine appearance, I felt sure, had saved me from such an indignity. But alas for vanity! This nurse checking me in was merely lazy. She

was too lazy even to deprive me of long fingernails, which are construed as weapons around a mental hospital, but two days later another nurse grabbed me near the office and hacked them off. Her instrument was a big, clumsy pair of clippers and I begged her to let me do it myself with an emery board, but she wouldn't listen.

Following my bath I was assigned a bed—in a room with three other patients, all of them mental. This is not surprising; alcoholic patients there are an insignificant minority and no special provisions have been made for them. My belongings were now returned, with a few exceptions. A hair brush and nail file were confiscated, as possibly lethal. When I asked if I might smoke, they told me yes, but only in the "Section". This term conjured up for me a mental picture of the smoking sections on trains and boats. I had visions of big, comfortable leather chairs, with ash stands and magazines. But "Section" proved to mean nothing more than plain lavatory, and never did I hear the toilets in Camarillo called anything but "Section" by those in charge.

When one wants a cigarette, however, one is not choosy. The nurse lighted my cigarette and I sauntered into the section. There was no place to rest save the toilets and a long, low towel cabinet on which about three people could sit. Once in a while some hardier soul would up-end a mop bucket for a seat, but for some obscure reason the nurses always raised hell when they caught anyone at this. If we were very tired, as we most generally were, we sat on the floor, leaning back against the tile wall.

The room was always crowded and unpleasant. The tobacco fumes were the least of the unpleasantness. Conversation was difficult, with anywhere from one to forty demented women perpetually charging in and out.

We could invariably discern an alcoholic. As a general thing, an alcoholic's bearing was more direct, her conversation almost uniformly humorous. This last, by the way, is regarded by a good many psychiatrists, in their published text-books, as a symptom—an unhealthy one. To quote verbatim from one such volume — "There was a certain appreciation of the ludicrous contradiction between fact and fancy. But a humorous perception of their condition is characteristic of drunkards in general.

Before many days had passed, I came to another conclusion: not all, but nearly all of the women alcoholics there were pretty darned nice girls. I've met women of far less worth who never drank. The answer may be that a drinker wouldn't wind up in such a place unless she had a sincerely interested family struggling for her rehabilitation. The dregs from the questionable parts of town have no one to care whether they die of drink or not. On the other hand, countless women get comfortably drunk every Saturday night because their relatives never learn they can commit the drinker.

A girl powdering her nose before the one small mirror grinned at my reflection.

"Did you ever think you'd wind up in the booby-hatch?" I smiled ruefully, and asked about Letty. The girl told me Letty was still officially a "bedcase" but that she occasionally came in to smoke. She went to find her.

There was a rule that every patient admitted to the hospital—sick or well—must stay in bed for three days after entering. To this end we were given not unattractive robes of red and white, or blue and white towelling. Blue felt bedroom slippers and voluminous flannel night gowns completed the outfit.

Letty came into the section. She started with surprise at seeing me.

"How come?" she inquired. "I didn't expect you before Saturday." (It was then Wednesday.)

I explained about waiving arraignment. I hurled questions at her about the place. When there was a point she hadn't learned as yet, we'd both appeal to some of the alcoholics who had been there a long time. It seemed that all the information we received was unpleasant. save possibly that there was a movie each Friday night and a dance about every six weeks. At the moment I'm afraid we weren't exactly steamed up over the prospect of hi-jinks in the bug-house.

We were told that we could write but one letter a week, that on one sheet of paper, covering only one side. This letter was censored by all the doctors and some of the nurses. We learned that although company could come every day from nine to eleven in the morning and two to four in the afternoon, no patients were allowed company until they had been in the hospital ten days. When we had been there a month we could apply for a court parole which meant, if it were granted, that we could go into one of the many courtyards, and smoke or exercise. When we had been in the hospital six

weeks, we could go for a day's outing with our families if they wrote in first requesting the privilege and promised to have us back by 4 p.m. We learned, and were stunned to learn, that all alcoholics were kept at least four months, frequently longer—never less. Those were just a bare few of the unhappy facts we learned.

Letty and I immediately started worrying about how Elise, due to arrive the next day, would react to all this. I guess she aroused the maternal in us. We made elaborate plans to watch her and brace her up if the need arose.

We compared notes on what had happened to us in our brief separation. She was inordinately amused to hear of my underskirt contretemps. This was occasioned by mother sending me a fresh frock to wear at my appearance in court because the dress the officers took me in was lavishly beer-splashed. The dress she sent was, unlike most of my dresses, cellophanely transparent, and she'd neglected to add a slip. Nor had I been wearing one. A kindly attendant at Psycho had rigged me out with a sort of curtain-like piece of material to tie around my waist, serving as petticoat. She felt, I think, that had I gone to court so interestingly x-ray, the psychopathic board might have become confused and sent me to Tehachapi, California's special prison for women.

All women would know, and most men could guess that I intended to dispose surreptitiously of this unique garment as soon as I gained the privacy of my room. But there was no privacy to be had. And mental hospital officials never accord one the privilege of acting on one's own

initiative. They figure automatically that any idea one of their patients has is, of necessity, bad. The nurse who supervised my bath absolutely refused to let me toss this raiment in a wastebasket. The rules were that everything worn must go to the "marking room" to be emblazoned with your shrinking name. Red tape to this nurse was what it was to the agent in "*Pigs is Pigs*". Rules is rules.

Letty and I cast about for some alleviating circumstance that would make all this less hard to take. It was difficult to find. We weren't saving rent, as the hospital charged a minimum of thirty dollars a month. And we weren't to get a long rest, as all ambulatory patients worked, and worked hard.

"Well, four months without makeup should do our faces some good," I sighed. I have the redhead's white eyelashes, and detest the daily applying of mascara necessary to transform me into an even passably fascinating wench.

"Take my advise and use makeup," a strange girl in the section said tersely, "If you look nice in the cafeteria the men over there serve you bigger helpings. We all have to flirt like hell around here to get enough to eat."

"Most of these nurses are burly babies, aren't they?"

The women in the section laughed. One said:

"They aren't nurses—they're attendants in nurses' uniforms." When I looked perplexed she explained,

"There are some twenty-five hundred patients here, and a little more than nine-hundred of them are women. There are about two hundred attendants, half of them women. The attend-

ants are allowed to take temperatures and pulses, and to give enemas and prescribed medicines, and that's all. In the women's half of the hospital, there are but two registered nurses, and they both work in surgery. There are four matrons in charge of the attendants, and I believe that one of them is a graduate nurse, but not an R. N."

So although we called the attendants "Nurse" half the time, in my entire stay I spoke but once to a real nurse, and that was when I thanked the nurse in Surgery for her assistance during my physical examination. Of course, we frequently talked with patients who were R. N.'s in the outside world, but you leave your profession in your suitcase when you enter one of these resorts.

Speaking of titles, the drunks in Camarillo were known as "I. A.'s", This is not to be confused with A-1! It is short for "Intemperance to Alcohol" and thus the commitment papers read.

"Lights out" came early—six o'clock for the bed patients. We were locked in our various rooms by the jarringly loud bolts. These noisy locks, I soon found, played an indispensable role in the hospital. The patients were always warned of an attendant's approach by the rattling keys. This gave opportunity to cease all "misbehavior". We had ample time to hide food or pencils or the verboten tweezers. Equally, the grating locks of ward doors apprised attendants of officials' entrance, and gave them time to hide food, magazines, or cards. They were always to be found standing at diligent attention.

About pencils: patients were, by rule, only supposed to have them on Sunday morning — letter-writing time. But to be fair to the attendants, this was one rule they ignored, at least where the better-behaved patients were concerned.

But getting back to bed: Few people would like to carry their academic interest or scientific research to the point of being locked in for the night with maniacs. I am not one of those few, and felt decidedly sleepless.

In the bed to my left there was a woman so deeply sunk in melancholy and of so dolorous an appearance that it depressed me to look at her. She sat up in bed at intervals through the night, shaking her head and whispering "My God! A madhouse!"

I didn't need the reminder.

In the bed directly ahead of me was a young woman who worried continually because a doctor, she asserted, had told her family that she was the most dangerously and criminally insane person he'd ever examined.

I worried right with her.

To complete our little foursome, the fourth bed contained an elderly woman, shockingly ill. She retched and groaned so alarmingly that I was surprised a doctor was not summoned. In about two hours the door was unlocked. The night nurse entered, while another stood in the doorway, hands on hips. The latter was the nurse who had supervised my shower. She had a vapidly pretty, babyish face and the body of an Amazon. Later I learned her husband was a supervisor attendant on the men's side of the hospital.

Followed a pretty display of boorishness.

"Why do they let these old bags fill up on candy," she stormed, "so that we have to give them salts and enemas?" I felt completely heartsick for the poor old lady. Upon learning she was completely deaf, I felt a shade more tolerant for the nurse, thinking she wouldn't speak so, if the patient could hear her. But as the weeks passed and I knew the nurse better, I came increasingly to doubt whether it would have made much difference to her.

The nurses held basins for the woman, washed her, and withdrew.

Crying had made me thirsty, so I looked for water. The patient in charge of making up our room had neglected to leave a water pitcher. I was to learn there were no drinking fountains or paper cups on sick bay. There were about six or eight metal cups around (purloined from the diet kitchen) that the patients borrowed indiscriminately back and forth, obtaining their water in the section. Also I was to find that sick bay had no garbage disposal facilities, so that patients on the diet kitchen detail would take pots and pans and *food trays* (we ate from metal trays—not dishes) right into the section and would scrape leftover food from them into the toilets—resting the spoons, trays and kettles on the bare, dirty toilets in the process!

All this disturbed me especially, because of the ugly gash on my upper lip which I had gotten in some way during this last spree. (The thread from its stitches hung out in a fan of whiskers, giving me the appearance, as Ricky fondly claimed, of a startled catfish.) Realizing that every known disease, save possibly the

bubonic plague and the Pharoahs' itch passed through sick bay, one can see why I'd be unhappy about the whole thing.

I retract the word "disturbed" in the foregoing paragraph. Having graduated from Camarillo College, and knowing its connotation there, I will substitute "displeased".

At about ten the nurse reappeared and gave me a sedative tablet. Still, sleep was impossible. The night was stabbed by frightening sounds. Screams. Curses. Meaningless laughter. Somewhere a woman was baying like a wolf. The verb is accurate; she sounded like the "Hound of the Baskervilles."

Dawn comes, even for the living dead. At six our door was unlocked. That first day was such a phantasmagoria to me I find it impossible to detail. In the afternoon the attendants and working patients watched nervously the big door that led to the office. This was because a fresh batch of patients was due, and this is always an event on sick bay. They await their new customers with a deserved dread, for some of them are not in the nature of a blessed event.

They arrived—seven of them. Elise was the only I-A in the lot. To my joy, she was placed in my room. (They transferred the worried nurse patient.)

Letty and I rallied around, but to our astonishment Elise found everything about the place much better than she'd expected. From her bed she stared out into the really lovely "visitors' patio", and she fairly reeked content.

"Isn't this nice?" she purred. "For a long time I won't have to worry about going to work and my husband *will have to* find a job. My little

gir is safe with my mother and I'll have a vacation from hearing about what a worry I am to everybody. Gosh, isn't this a beautiful hospital?"

Our noble resolve to shelter poor little Elise died aborning.

"What about all these maniacs knocking about?"

"Oh them!" Elise disposed of the lunatics with a snap of her fingers. "I got used to nuts up in Psycho."

Twice a day our temperatures and pulses were taken. The nurse on the first shift did this in the orthodox secretive fashion of screening the result with her hand when she wrote it. The other nurse, possibly from long dealing with uncaring mental patients, recorded it unconcernedly under our very noses. Thus I learned that I ran a good fever during my three days in bed. But no one seemed interested, so I, too, ignored it.

Once in the morning and again in the early afternoon one or more doctors went through. These were the most perfunctory visits imaginable—an affable "good morning" and they passed on. This was not premeditatedly callous, however. Should a patient be sorely in need of medical attention, the attendants usually knew of it, and the doctor made a special visit, or the patient visited surgery. If the doctors paused long enough to listen to every patient's tale of woe, they'd never be through. All people go to great length to bore doctors with their symptoms, so one can readily imagine how this state of affairs is magnified in an insane asylum. Furthermore, during my stay, there were but

eight doctors, not counting the dentist, to listen to the endless complaints of almost three thousand paients. Daily.

While I was still a bed patient, the doctor sent for me twice. Each time I entered his office, he questioned me briefly and with courtesy. Evidently I couldn't convince him, for each time he asked me the same questions—If I knew where I was and what year it was. As I am one of those dopes who keep on heading letters 1938 for five months after it has become 1939, possibly the doctor's attitude was justified. Three times within five minutes he asked me if I had any complaints. I could have mentioned what I thought of the absence of drinking cups, and the garbage disposal, but I thought better of it. I had been thoroughly coached by the sea-lawyers, those self-appointed advice dispensers nn the section, to have *no complaints*, unless I wished to run the risk of being diagnosed as having an incipient case of " delusions of persecution." So the doctor was allowed to gather by inference that I loved the joint.

When I was given the I. Q. test, however, the fun began. As before, the sea-lawyers were indispensable. They warned me one of the questions would be "Who were the first four presidents. Or possibly the last four. I had excelled in ancient history through school, but American history had not sufficiently aroused my interest. I felt I could remember the last four presidents, but the girls had to remind me of the first four. Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison. I fixed W A J M firmly in what passes for my mind just before I pushed open the door.

In addition to the doctor, there was in his

office a beautiful youngster who acted as his secretary. She proved to be a self-committed alcoholic named Margo, who held, on the outside, a responsible position as script girl at one of the major studios. Sensible and precautionary, when she awoke to the realization that she was using a quart of whiskey daily, she asked to be admitted to the hospital.

"Sit down, Wilma," said Dr. Milland, pleasantly. "Tell me, why do you drink?"

"I don't know, Dr. Milland," I confessed. "I wish I did understand why. Apparently I have made some progress in fighting it."

"Do you feel your stay here will be beneficial?"

"I don't know, Doctor. I fret so much about mounting debts I'll resent this enforced loss of wages. And, as you know, I am a periodic drinker, and will be here during those months that I will not crave a drink and nothing could induce me to take one, so it appears rather futile."

"Who was the last president?"

"Roosevelt."

"Before him?"

"Hoover."

"Before him?"

"Coolidge."

"Before him?"

"Harding."

"Before him?"

"You're fudging, Doctor!" I complained. After all, he was delving into a time when I'd not the remotest interest in politics. Also, I felt the sea-lawyers had betrayed me.

"When was the Civil War?" was next.

"1861 to 1865."

"What was it about?"

"On the surface, the abolition of slavery. Sub rosa, it was economic, the same as any modern war."

"How much is nine times nine?"

"Forty-nine? No, I guess it's eighty-one."

"If a fish and a half cost a cent and a half, what would seven fish cost?"

I cast about furtively for an abacus. Mathematics, as well as prudence, had been omitted when the "fairies had gathered for my christening". I did a bit of finger-tabulating, hidden, I hope, by the desk.

"Eleven cents?" I hazarded, desperately. The doctor's face was inscrutable. He was playing 'em close to the belly. (I wanted to explain to him that for a time it appeared as if I would be the smartest one in the fractions class at school--at least the only one that could vote.)

In high school I had been one of the few students allowed by dispensation to drop algebra, and to major in literature. When I came to enter U. S. C. the registrar made as much fuss over those missing credits as if they'd been the lost books of Sappho. I was told to make them up, or else.

I wore out three tutors and four "Shutts" Elementary Geometry" books, and then I took the "or else".

It's understood, of course, that at my advanced age this was not a true intelligence quotient test—but some of the answers I blithely proffered made me a fit I. Q. subject.

Have you ever had delirium tremens?" asked the doctor.

The sea-lawyers had warned me if I'd ever had this inglorious malady to forget it hastily.

"I'm not sure, Doctor," I said, "but I've had some terrible dreams! "

The doctor gave me a look. "Denies D. T. 's, " he muttered to his secretary.

"Is anyone mean to you? " whispered the doctor, insidiously. I fingered my poor stitched lip and felt awful sorry for myself. Longingly I looked at the doctor's nice broad shoulder— Just the shoulder on which to stage a little Niobe act. But remembering the sea-lawyers, I said "No," laughingly.

"Do people follow you?" this amazing man wanted to know next.

This, too, was denied.

I could have told him about the two guys in a Dusenberg who followed me for five blocks down Hollywood Boulevard once, but was afraid the doctor would think I was bragging.

"What kind of work do you do, Miss Wilson?"

"I'm a waitress."

At his astonished expression, I added, belligerently, "And a good one, too."

"What did you do before that?"

"I worked for three years for a doctor who ran a small emergency hospital."

"What made you give that up?"

"The doctor shot his wife five times and then took cyanide. "

"That's as good a reason as I've ever heard to change jobs," said Dr. Milland. "What did you do in the hospital? "

"Oh, the usual thing - sterilizing instruments, made swabs and dressings, urinalysis, typed in-

surance reports, did minor wound dressings, was receptionist."

"Was that your first job? "

"No—before that I swam in motion pictures and water ballets, or doubled for feature players."

"You've certainly had a varied career. Well, Miss Wilson, the alcoholic commitment here from Los Angeles County is four months to two years. Are you willing to stay? "

"I'd rather not, Doctor. I understand one is entitled to a jury trial if one applies within five days. I am applying now, through you."

"Why do you want a jury trial? "

"Judge Munsey meant this commitment for my good, I know. But in court I was too stunned to marshal any facts with which to present him. I plan to be married to a man whose work takes him to foreign countries, wherever there are oil fields. He expects a foreign contract momentarily. If I stay here the four months, I'll be on a twenty-month parole—not to leave the State. He doesn't want to go without me—but why should his work suffer because of my foolishness and difficulties? My own intelligence will lead me to combat liquor and, with a measure of contentment and serenity, I'd stand more of a chance of success than I would have in here, without income or freedom, and worrying about what this is costing my fiance. "

"Wilma, every alcoholic patient we have has some 'urgent reason' not to stay—the 'best job of their lives' or they want to 'get married'. We have found we can't listen."

"I hadn't thought of it like that, Doctor, " I said slowly. "This is the first time in years I've

felt happiness within my grasp -- and I've been obsessed with the desire. "

"I'll apply for a trial for you, Wilma, " said the doctor.

The interview was over. Heartsick, I returned down the hall and climbed back into bed.

The next morning ended my three days' siesta. An attendant appeared at dawn, hurled a bundle of clothing in my direction, and said brusquely, "Get up and go to work!"

"By this time I was more than ready for work"

CHAPTER V

By this time I was more than ready for work. The past three days had taught me (I catch on quick) that diversions other than work are impossible in an insane asylum. If you read a magazine—and you are fortunate in finding a temporary lull in the unholy din—just as you become engrossed in your reading, you are enraged to find that one of the maniacs has torn pages from the most exciting portion of your story. If you attempt to play bridge, you are almost certain to find one or more cards missing from the deck. If you attempt to gossip,

woman's chief pastime, there is always a stool pigeon or so hanging around. So for pastime, you work.

There were radios in each ward, but evidently there solely for the bedazzlement of visitors. Each radio was locked in a wicker cabinet and almost never turned on, to avoid dissension. The inmates all wanted to hear different programs: ergo, to obviate bickering, no one was allowed to listen to the radio.

Fun, of a sort peculiar to institutions, was rampant, and while my inherent gaiety responded to the hospital jests and the wittier alcoholics' clowning, still I couldn't help but feel there was something noxious in finding amusement in deviations from the norm. Mimicry on the sane patients' part of the mental patients, and reiterated quoting of their more ludicrous statements, made me smile, but shamefacedly. Still, what would you? There were no books, nor were the conversations exactly scintillating.

Mental patients are but people. There were pleasant ones and unpleasant, troublesome and lovable. However, insanity resembles drunkenness inasmuch as it frequently brings out in an individual all that is ugly. Of the hundreds of insane persons there, few were likable. With the sure instinct for self-preservation the sane patients determined which of the mental patients to avoid when possible.

My duties on sick bay were not clearly defined. Several girls were assigned to the diet kitchen detail. Three tims a day two of them would go to the cafeteria and trundle back a huge food cart. Its contents would then be ladled onto metal trays and served to the bed patients. A

few patients assembled in the small dining room of sick bay but most of our contingent had to be forcibly fed. Had they not been ill or intractable patients, they would have been on one of the wards.

However, I didn't fall heir to any job as clean as kitchen work. There were, on sick bay, long rows of cells and somebody had to clean them. The beskirted Tartar who was in charge gave my tall strong body one calculating look, and presented me with a mop.

The cells were called, technically, something much nicer, but cells they were. Although they were scoured once each day, and sometimes oftener, with antiseptic, and the bedding completely changed, there always emanated from these rooms a sour, revolting stench. This was not the fault of the institution. The buildings were clean and modern. The fault lies in the nature of the hospital's mission. There is an indefinable odor to insanity, an identifying scent as unmistakable as the odor of death, and far more unpleasant. Once smelled, it is always easily recognizable: It is not the odor of blood, or vomit, or urine, or excretion, or sweat, or pus, nor yet a combination of these, although all of these were present. It is something more, intangible but distinguishing.

Without describing the first cell I cleaned, I will say that even the callous attendant laughed and reported that I'd had my trial by fire. I didn't rebel but my stomach did.

Again and again the Augean stables came to my mind, but I reflected grimly that the Staff would scarcely let me out to attempt diverting the nearby Santa Clara River!

The empty rooms were bad enough to clean, but when the rooms contained a "guest", the work was harrowing. At such times one had to be wary. Turning your back to some of those babies was inviting trouble. The first patient to grapple with me was a garrulous, emotional Frenchwoman. She might kiss whoever came within her reach, or she might bite them, or she might spit on them—one could but be sure she'd do something.

On this occasion I had carried her tray down, and waited for the attendant to unlock the door. The patient was stark naked, and talking very excitedly about some imagined mistreatment. The pretty little redhaired attendant was amused and answering her soothingly. When the cell was unlocked, the patient broke past the attendant and went flying down the hall, the little nurse racing after her. The fact that doctors or male employees might be in the hall to see her nudity would not matter, of course, to a crazed woman.

I was enjoying this spectacle hugely, when suddenly the frenzied patient doubled on her tracks and made for me, brushing aside the little nurse as though she were a child. Taken by surprise, I dropped the tray and put up my dukes. Two or three other nurses heard the fracas and came to my rescue. Although unhurt, I was decidedly uncomfortable.

Before many days had passed. I came to know more of my charges, and to become fond of them. One girl, whom I shall call Charlene, in particular took my fancy. A pretty little dark haired thing, she lay for days trussed in a camisole. She was irrational but not vicious: At least

I never heard or saw her show venom. But the attendants, for some reasons best known to themselves, kept her bound.

Prior to entering Camarillo I had read, from time to time, articles anent mental institutions. One and all claimed that straight-jackets were medieval garments no longer in use. Maybe they aren't. But a camisole is a heavy canvas jacket with blind sleeves. The wearer's arms are clamped to his body, and the whole dainty affair is laced up the back. Two mental patients put one on me one day, as I wanted to experience the feel of it. Five minutes of it had me writhing in discomfort and panic. No straight-jackets? A "rose by any other name—". Euphemisms abound in the bughouse.

South American deerflies and greased lightning are reputed to be fast but for rapidity of movement it would be hard to beat the sick bay flying wedge squad. This squad was composed of two attendants and five working patients. If we heard a "bad" patient had company, we would descend on her in a body. One of us would unlace the camisole, another would comb the patient's hair, still another would wash her; then a fresh nightie would be slipped over her head and she'd be carried bodily to a clean chamber. This whole rapid process usually left the "bad" patient so dazed, she would be quiet and well behaved while her visitors admired the cleanness of her person and the ordered privacy of her "room".

Some visitors are not so readily deceived. I once saw, through the tiny inspection window of a cell door, a pair of shrewd relatives draw down the bedclothing and examine the black

and blue marks on the body of their little sister patient. This is not as damning as it sounds, because an ill person bruises easily and many such bruises are self-inflicted when the patient resists attendants' helping hands which are, more often than not, gentle.

Evidently the first thing that leaves a mind, when disorder creeps in, is that fine edge of self-control that makes it possible for humans to conduct themselves civilly with one another. Mental patients aren't so much like naughty children as they are like perverse disgusting children. And in some of the "bad" wards, which I was to see later, the patients are far worse than animals. Animals have a certain dignity that these humans have lost completely. Sane patients and attendants have to reiterate to themselves constantly, "—They are sick people—don't lose your temper—poor things—they can't know what they're doing—overlook it—overlook it—overlook it—".

The sane patients were too afraid of bad marks on their charts to hit an insane patient, but I saw more than one goaded attendant lose control. Vicious patients make it hard for nurses to hold their tempers, but civil service should select employees so carefully as to weed out the possibility of brutality. When my time came to leave the hospital, I was given a printed form to fill out. On it was the question "Did you ever see an attendant mistreat a patient?" I wasn't on oath, therefore there was no question of perjury, but still I hated to lie. Something told me, however, that if I answered "yes" there might be obstacles placed in the path of my leaving. At the very least, I would be held while the staff

investigated my complaints. Most anyone would lie to go free from such surroundings. Under the boring eyes of the chief matron, I hesitated a long time over that question, at last writing a tremulous "no"—with the fingers of my left hand crossed in time-honored custom.

Right from the start I got in trouble on sick bay. The woman in charge there was a frosty individual who apparently liked no one. The alcoholics were agreed that this woman's disposition was so savage she probably went home at night and bit herself for amusement. When I had been there but a day or two, and before recognizing what an important personage she was I noticed her reading a newspaper whose headlines enticingly proclaimed "Camarillo patient beaten."

"May I look at that next?" I asked excitedly. She coldly refused. That same afternoon I ran laughingly up the hall, pursued by a girl who wanted to wrest some candy from me. We were sternly rebuked for being noisy in a place of illness. This, of course, was just, but it was unjust to expect the alcoholics always to act with decorum, while about us the deranged patients howled and lauged and stomped with enviable abandon any hour of the day or night.

These two incidents combined with my asking for a jury trial, which seemed to imply I felt myself better than the rest, were sufficient to start me off on the wrong foot in the booby-hatch. Most of the attendants took their cue from the sick bay boss nurse and treated me coldly. Later I was to do things that really warranted censure, but up to this time I'd been working hard and trying hard, and the attend-

ants' disdainful treatment of me was galling, especially since it was sufficiently noticeable as to become a hospital joke and was not existent in my hypersensitive imagination alone.

Not all of the nurses were snooty to me, however. I fell with practiced ease into my lifelong niche of being the fall-guy, patsy and scapegoat, but the pet of the few who were jolly. All redheads are accustomed to this anomalous classification.

While the attendants had patients do the arduous and more messy of the daily work, still the attendants had hard and unpleasant jobs. Then too, there was always danger. I asked a newly married nurse, June Gibbs, if her husband didn't worry about her job.

"Yes," she laughed, "he's worried for fear I'll lose it!"

Little by little (generally when it was too late) I learned to keep my mouth shut about things I saw and learned. I had been tying up violent patients and putting camisoles on them when ordered to do so, for many days before I learned the attendants had no right to shift this task to the working patients. There is a hospital rule to the effect that no patient was to put another patient in "restraint".

As far as the rules and doctors' orders went, there was no malpractice, but a lazy attendant —and many of them are lazy—can play hob with a good set of rules when no one is looking. For example: One morning I went down the row of cells in my care, trying to hold my breath while in the more odorous ones, sweeping, mopping, changing beds, and emptying pots while the little redhaired attendant stood at the doors

she had unlocked. We came to a door marked "Quarantine".

"I must do this room, Wilma," she said, taking the mop from my hand and going at the work in business-like fashion. The room contained, I knew, a scarlet fever case, and from the nurse's action, I deduced another patient was not allowed to be unnecessarily exposed.

The next day a brunette nurse, a comely, indolent girl, made the rounds with me.When I paused at the door of the quarantined cell, she said, "Go ahead—what are you waiting for?" I decided the disease was past the communicable stage and mopped flourishingly. On the third day the little red head was once more on duty. At the quarantined room, she again took the mop. A little discreet questioning brought out the fact that the disease was still virulent, and the second nurse had merely not felt like mopping.

When I was in Psycho the first time, I became quite fond of the little girl whom Rose had protected during an epileptic fit. This child's worried family had agitated until they got her in Camarillo where she'd be "watched" during her fits. They loved her and wanted her home, but she frequently fell and hurt her head. I met her again in Camarillo, her scalp all stitched up. She was still falling and hurting her head. No special care was given epileptics. One day a sick bay nurse asked me if I'd ever seen a patient seized by such a fit. As she asked me, she unlocked a door and let me look within at the writhing sufferer, then she relocked it and went about her business!

The epileptic child I mentioned was sane, al-

though sub-normal from illness and lack of schooling. She was very gentle and sweet. When her grandmother and sister heard that Judge Munsey had paroled me, they asked if I'd try to get up to Camarillo and see her some time. Accordingly, months later Ricky drove me up, both of us curious to see the hospital I'd so narrowly escaped. But I wasn't allowed to see the girl, because I wasn't a relative and her grandmother had not written my name on the child's visiting card. Often and often, in the bitter days that followed, was I to smile ironically think- of how I'd once stormed this citadel and been turned away!

The general assumption of alcoholics who commit themselves, and of alcoholics' families, is that these institutions give the unfortunate drinker some effective, if unadvertised, cure. Well, an alcoholic is given a dose of salts and a Wassermann. And then the alcoholic is given a mop or a polishing block used for waxing floors. If these cure drinking, then commitments are not in vain.

Whole chapters could be written around these polishing blocks. They are heavy blocks of wood mounted on stiff brushes, and are pushed by a long handle. I had no opportunity to weigh one, but I was told that they weighed between forty and sixty-five pounds. When I asked why the State didn't supply electrical waxers, I was told pushing blocks had a therapeutic value. Upon considering this, it seemed logical. There are hundreds of patients there who get very little exercise, but whose minds are so far gone they can't be entrusted with other types of work. Nevertheless, the State and the doctors must

mean patients to push blocks for not more than a few hours daily, but I knew of many patients who pushed blocks ten and twelve hours a day.

The reason the blocks are so very heavy is to

"A dose of salts and a Wassermann"

reduce the chances that they will be used as weapons. I am very strong, but could scarcely lift one with both hands. However, it IS true that an insane person has a mysterious reserve of strength to draw upon and on several occasions I saw one of these cumbersome things held straight above some berserk patient's head while she attempted to bring it down on someone else's skull!

"One always reads of insane strength," I remarked one day to a nurse, "and I've seen it proven—look how it sometimes takes five of us to hold 90 year old, 85 pound 'Grandma'—but one also reads of 'maniacal cunning' and so far

I've seen no evidence of the nuts being so shrewd—have you?"

"Indeed I have," she replied. "On some of the other wards the attendants have to think fast to prevent the patients from outsmarting them."

I returned thoughtfully to my polishing. Upon first entering the hospital, I had admired the miles of mirror-like corridors. The phrase "mirror-like" is used advisedly; it was possible to sit on the floor and know what was taking place about one by watching the reflections. These floors seemed to be of some very expensive linoleum or composition. Astonishingly, they were of cement, painted red and waxed.

One morning I was given a "six-bed dormitory" to do. After emptying six potties and changing six beds, I swept and dusted. Then I got a polishing block and went to work. I worked as I always have, whether at home when in a hurry or for an employer—hard and fast. I worked up a big sweat. It was not a glow nor yet a perspiration—it was an honest sweat. At last I viewed the glittering finished product proudly, and called the supercilious nurse to inspect. She didn't look at my beautiful floor! She looked at her watch.

"Better give it another forty-five minutes," she advised, blandly.

At last I knew why all the other patients polished with such W.P.A. thrusts. (I did too from then on.) But when the forty-five minutes were up, although the nurse looked at me snootily several times, she didn't relieve me. When the call to lunch finally rescued me, I had worked one hour and forty-five minutes beyond the time

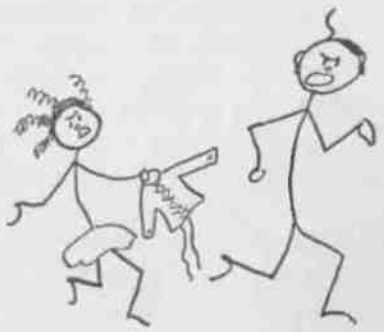
the floor was first put in perfect condition.

This same dormitory caused me some woe. I received strict orders from the powers-that-be to do every bed myself, and I received equally strict orders from a homicidal-acting negress (wall-eyed at that) to leave the bed SHE slept in alone. It's problematical who frightened me more—the pickle-pussed charge nurse or the bellicose black. So I employed the age-old cat's-paw stratagem, and bribed a third patient to make up the bed that was under fire.

Speaking of bedmaking, I had great difficulty mastering the mitered corners requisite in hospitals. I simply couldn't fold them unless I stood with my back to the pillows, to get started right. One day the charge nurse, inspecting my work, said:

"If you plan on being married, Wilma, everything you learn here will be of value in your married life."

This statement was accepted with reservations. I still can't see how it will help to know how to snap Ricky into a Camisole.



CHAPTER VI.

Now that I was no longer a "bedcase" I had two new experiences. Although I still worked on sick bay, I was transferred to Ward 6 to sleep as it would be my permanent home while in the hospital, and was told that henceforth I would take my meals in the cafeteria.

The word "cafeteria" recalled to my urban mind delightful mental pictures of picking and choosing food. I envisioned delightful quibbling over whether to order strawberry shortcake or melon for dessert. Unhappily, the grim reality was that we marched in file by wards into the huge dining hall, each selecting a metal tray and a spoon, then as we straggled past the food, the serving men and women would ladle out to us a large spoonful of beans, a spoonful of carrots or another vegetable, two pieces of bread, a small square of butter and a cup of something—"coffee" in the mornings, bitter tea at noon, and at night, water, or, on Sunday night a cup of milk. It was the same unappetizing food that was served on sick bay, and if anything, we got a little less in quantity.

We invariably sat at the same table. The at-

tendants passed out the salt cellars, and then after the meal counted them in, as they could be used as weapons. We were always allowed all the bread we wanted and in the mornings could have second servings of the "coffee", but of nothing else. No matter how fast or slowly a ward ate, we stayed our allotted time in the cafeteria, then filed out, slinging our empty trays into a long narrow aperture that led to the dishwashing department as we left.

Half of the dining room was for men, half for women. The attendants had still another dining room, and the very august doctors yet a third.

The men and women patients entered our dining room and left by opposite sides, but some flirtation went on, and there was a great deal of note passing from the women patients to the men who served us. I understand that some of the notes passed by mental patients were really dillies, but I didn't see any of those. I saw most of the notes, both incoming and outgoing, passed by the women alcoholics in our ward to the men alcoholics in the cafeteria. We were nearly all guilty of this misdemeanor of note passing, as it was a surprisingly effective means of relieving the tedium of institutional existence. There was nothing reprehensible in these notes—none of those I saw were vulgar or "mushy". They generally contained wisecracks, or promises to save certain dances at the next bughouse ball, or hospital gossip. These notes were part of the powerful "grapevine".

Ward 6 was known variously, as a "good ward", an "industrial ward" or a "worker's ward". But even there we had many patients

who were nuttier than a fruit cake, and who would, from time to time, become thoroughly and wholeheartedly "disturbed".

Patients who worked, and could feed themselves, walked across the big inner courtyard to the dining room, and for some obscure reason, intelligible only to a psychiatrist, this made these patients be known—on the reports that went to Sacramento—as "paroled patients". At least the dining room was called the "Paroled patients' dining hall".

So now I had a title and everything. was a "Paroled Patient assigned to a working ward, detailed to sick bay". Something like "Custodian of the Grand Templar's Left Gilt Epaulette".

The first ward I saw was number 5, as one had to be unlocked through there to reach Ward 6. The wards were a revelation to me. They were long rectangular halls, each having four dormitories to lead off from each corner forming a huge H. The walls of these halls were vast arched windows containing doors that unlocked into the courtyards that honeycombed the hospital. The floors, of course, gleamed, and there were anywhere from sixty to eighty comfortable, wicker chairs placed in orderly rows at night, but arranged attractively around the hall by day. Flowers, which grew in profusion around the hospital's exterior, were plucked, and colorful bouquets bedecked the workers' wards. Most wards contained a magazine rack, and the inevitable locked radio, but there were no rugs or pictures or other knicknacks dear to feminine hearts.

It was night when I saw my first ward, and

Each chair in the long row contained a woman. Beyond, the windows gleamed darkly from the blackness without.

"Why," I gasped, "it looks like the promenade deck of a ship!"

Gloria, the sweet little mental patient who worked in Hydro, chuckled.

"Do you know what it made me think of when I firs saw it?" she asked. "Ellis Island! Everyone in the ward chairs had a small cloth bag at her feet—everyone looked bewildered, and they all talked 'in tongues'."

Soon I, too, was to have a cloth bag. There are no such things in the hospital as drawers or lockers for women patients, and they have to cart every possession all the time. If you think this isn't a refinement of torture for a woman—you don't know your women! To have to condense every trifle or cosmetic or valuable that she may need for months into a small portable bag—well, it's asking too much.

We were allowed a bag at the heads of our beds, but this was not to contain anything beyond our nighties and magazines. We were assigned a cubbyhole in the clothesroom — to contain clothes only. We had a cubbyhole in the shoe room—for shoes. Food that was brought us by visitors, or that we ordered with the dollar and a half a week we were allowed to spend was kept in the "supply room" which was unlocked once a day, six days a week. We got what we needed then, or else. The clothes room was nearly always unlocked, but the supply room, shoe room and dormitories almost drove us crazy—those of us who weren't already,

I mean. If we needed something from one of these caches, invariably the attendant was too busy or tired or cross to oblige us. If we found a few spare minutes and could talk someone into waving our hair, usually it would turn out that the waving fluid was locked up someplace, and we were out of luck.

These storing places I've mentioned are subject to inspection, and it is very dangerous to be caught with bottles in your bed bag, or cosmetics in your clothes box. Also, all of these places, with the exception of the supply room, are at the mercy of thieves, and they are many, in a mental institution. So in self-defence we lugged, at all times, in shoe boxes or cloth bags, our lares and penates. An inventory of my bag would show a comb and complete supply of cosmetics, one almost complete deck of cards, love letters (very dog-eared), a prune sandwich purloined from the breakfast table against that mid-morning hunger, two priceless pencils, a few snapshots (one very sticky from having been used as a sugar scoop to get the last vestige of my one allotted spoonful of sugar up from my tray) an apple presented by an admirer in the cafeteria, a toothbrush which showed unhappy proximity with an indelible pencil, three verboten stamps which had lost their stickum in the fray, two rubber bands, sixty-nine hairpins, one emaciated bar of soap, a handful of toilet paper, a small bottle of vinegar for shampoo rinse, a small bottle of shampoo soap, three notes from men—two alcoholics and one screwball, and, hidden so very deep it wouldn't have been worth the trouble to dig it out, one incriminating match.

From time to time my bag contained more—but it never contained less.

The shameful way young Dr. Stoddard misled us! When Elise and I, in Psycho, asked him about Camarillo as a residence, he told us that the committed girls "fixed up their rooms".

"Fixed up their rooms"

"You know", he explained, with masculine clumsiness, "They send home for stuff. Sofa pillows and pictures and—things," he finished vaguely. He gave us the impression that there would be two of us to a room. As a matter of fact, each of the four dormitories in a ward contained thirty beds, making in each ward room for one hundred and twenty women, and Heaven help the female who attempted to introduce any extraneous matter in the shining

emptiness of a dormitory. I think Dr. Stoddard had us confused with the Campfire Girls At Vassar.

Now I had to learn a whole new routine. The Ward 6 dwellers were unlocked through the many intervening doors from sick bay at seven each night. For an hour and a half we could play cards or read, but generally we were too tired. Sometimes we seized this opportunity to manicure our nails, wash hose or do the myriad little tasks of women. At eight-thirty we were in bed and counted. After the attendant tried the rear door of the dormitory, we were locked in until shortly after five the next morning.

During my stay, the dormitory I slept in contained more alcoholics than any other in the hospital — fifteen of us. The other fifteen patients who slept there were fairly well-behaved mental patients. Therefore I think we had the most fun. From what we heard of other dormitories, we appreciated ours. In some of them were heavy snorers; in others, crabby people who would threaten to report any talking; in yet others were violent patients who howled and fought. But our dormitory was never reprimanded except for having the giggles, or talking too long after "lights out".

At eleven o'clock at night the guard changed. The doors were unlocked and the lights went on. The lights at Camarillo, like all else there, were under lock and key. It took a special thin key inserted in the wall-switch to control them.

The attendant who was taking over, accompanied by the one who was going off duty, would stalk in, count noses and again try the rear door. This over, we'd be locked in again,

undisturbed save for a flash-light beam thrown around the room at half-hour intervals.

A typical day in the hospital was an interminable stretch of minor and major annoyances interspersed with a few laughs. Some time after five A. M. the lights would flash on, the door would grate horribly, and the night nurse would walk through, calling invariably, "Good morning, girls! Rise and shine!"

We would rise but we'd do very little shining. Down the hall to the big section we would run to perform our morning ablutions. There was one deep basin that ran both hot and cold water, and three huge semi-circular fountains that ran warm water. You made the water spray in these by pressing a foot on a rail below. As Letty remarked cheerfully, we wouldn't forget how to stand at a bar while we were in protective custody.

On the walls were two mirrors—each smaller than a pillow case. If you can imagine more than a hundred women trying to prepare for the day before two small mirrors—one can visualize bedlam. These mornings will always be a dreary memory for me.

The conversation that rose and fell in waves was almost uniformly unpleasant. Most mental patients have a set plaint or chant, that grates on the hearer exceedingly. I could quote dozens of them by heart, but in this account I shall try not to portray the mental patients particularly because firstly it would take volume after volume, secondly, their respective families could easily recognize the patients by the speech or actions described, and thirdly, it would accomplish nothing for the reader except to leave him

with a heavy heart and depressed mental attitude.

We "drunks" stuck pretty much together — possibly because fire-water will find its own level, but more probably because it was comforting to know we could expect from each other lucid conversation and rational conduct. This doesn't mean that some of the mental patients weren't fine people—gracious and pleasant—*but* one never knew when they'd get "disturbed".

Here is an instance that will show why we didn't trust the lunatics' friendship: I asked a girl who spoke Spanish to translate for me the words of a Mexican song. She complied gladly. We got it on paper and I memorized the words. Weeks later, when I'd forgotten the incident, the girl became "disturbed". We met in the hall when she was patently in a very pugnacious frame of mind.

"Listen, you Wilma Wilson," she said, nastily, "I want the words to that song and I want them damn' quick!"

"What song?" I asked blankly.

"Rancho Grande!" she snarled. "You give them back to me or else!"

"Why, Jennie," I told her, "I lost that paper weeks ago."

"Well, you get them or you'll be sorry!" and she stalked away.

Trivial? Yes. But it was the trivial things that made no moment dull in our life with the loons.

We called ourselves, resignedly, "the drunks" —and the mental patients invariably called themselves, cheerfully and openly "nuts", while our Alma Mater was known to everyone excluding the Staff as the "bughouse".

There were a few patients in the hospital on different commitments, chiefly narcotic addicts or persons suffering a social disease. However, I met but one of the latter, a girl who had spent a year on Ward 6 because of syphilis. How she stayed sane is an unexplained miracle. Certainly she was so embittered as to be abnormal when she left.

Our pet word for the mentally ill was "ding-y". Whether this was derived from lunatics so often hearing bells ding in their ears or not, I don't know—but it was dinged in our ears around Camarillo.

We had some very kindly sweet attendants, but even so the women patients in this hospital were not allowed as much latitude as were the men. An asylum is a man's world. The good men patients were allowed to keep money, matches, razors and watches. And they were allowed to gamble. These privileges were accorded to all well-behaved men patients, but the men alcoholics were evidently considered "great guys" by their attendants who seemed to admire them for having the physical stamina, money and perseverance to drink to the point of needing hospitalization. The attendants gambled with them, ran errands for them and even aided and abetted the drunks in their flirtations. I have known, too, of men I-As having liquor while confined there.

Not so with the female of the species: women attendants apparently thought girls who drank were too depraved to be worthy of courtesies. Even though the nurses became fond of individual alcoholics they wouldn't smuggle important letters out for us or do us other favors.

Perhaps the feminine employees were afraid of losing their jobs: women seldom have the "what the hell—why not?" attitude that men have.

For awhile on Ward 6 we had a swell time playing poker for cigarettes, but we were stopped in short order when the attendants realized we were indulging a vice under their very noses!

To get back to our typical day: we had made our beds, of course, within ten minutes after being awakened. If we'd been fortunate enough or ruthless enough to find elbow room, we had shiveringly washed our faces and combed our hair. (The bedroom slippers, flannel gowns and toweling robes are strictly a thing of sick bay, taken from patients the minute the three day observation period is over. Now, unless we had robes and slippers sent from home, we went barefoot and slept in nighties made from something much coarser than flour-sacking.)

At six A. M. the nurse would call "sick bay", which meant that the thirty-odd women who worked there must assemble by the door. After we were unlocked through three big doors, we reached sick bay and most of us headed straight for the section where we could get our first light because the Ward 6 nurses refused to light cigarettes that early. I am an inveterate smoker, but it nauseates me to smoke before having coffee in the morning — or at least some hot liquid other than tasteless warm water. As we had to get up at five-thirty and didn't eat until seven-thirty, this left me with two miserable hours. From six until seven-thirty I had to empty pots, bedpans and do other nauseating tasks which didn't relieve my queasiness. Habit-bound I may seem, but always, in adult years,

I've been able to face unpleasantness much more valorously after a matutinal cup of coffee and a cigarette.

There was, in the diet kitchen, a list of names, chiefly of the kitchen-detail girls or old timers around sick bay, who were entitled to a cup of coffee before starting work. The rest of us were beyond the pale. I spent twelve or fourteen miserable mornings like this, and then Ricky, on his second visit, brought me the wherewithal to contrive myself coffee. First he brought me powdered coffee, and later a tiny dripolator with cans of ground coffee. This possession immediately brought me head-swelling popularity.

Then down the endless row of cells. Each morning they seemed to accomplish the impossible—to be in a more revolting state than the day before. Frequently nausea made us run for the section.

There was one patient we all tried to get out of tending. Her practice was so incredibly obnoxious as to make us daily lose our meals. In fact, when one of us would tear wildeyed into the section, others of us gathered there would leer knowingly and say, "You've been cleaning up Piggy, I take it?"

Good taste, if not censorship, prevents me from describing the unbelievable habit of this woman.

It is not for me, a layman, to question the hospital's procedure in any respect — but one thing happened during my stay that did seem thoughtless on the part of the Staff. If the attendants were too ignorant to see their error,

the doctors should not have been so busy as to allow this to happen.

A very little girl with a severe nervous affliction was brought in. She had injured her back at grammar school, and had been subject to convulsive gestures and speech since her injury. She was considered sane, at least she was sane enough to warrant protection from harsh sights whenever possible.

Although there were many empty beds in the various rooms and dormitories of sick bay, inexplicably they put this little kid in the room where lay the poor mindless woman who did nothing all day but this horrendous, disgusting chain of actions! It was pitiful to hear the child complain. We felt for her. The brief glimpses we caught of the woman and her nauseating dietary tendencies made us retch, and if the staff had tried to make any of us sleep in the same room with that abomination, it would have taken many attendants and stout camisoles to get us there. Sometimes the hospital has a good, if obscure reason for some of its apparently aimless plans—but not the wildest imagination coud find anything helpful to that child in being near such a monstrosity. It could be nothing but an oversight, pure and simple, on the part of the hospital, but such oversights should not occur. Not when the nation's best psychiatric minds are supposed to be behind this hospital's routine.

At eleven-thirty we'd go to lunch. During the afternoon there would sometimes be a lull in the bustle of tasks. During one of these interludes I once asked for, and received, permission to go out in one of the small courtyards with a herd

of deranged patients they were giving an airing. It was an experience I regretted and never sought again.

The visitor's patio, visible from sick bay's windows, is as radiant, the year around, as a jewel. It is an admirable "front" for the hospital, as visitors automatically think of their loved ones as gamboling on the greensward, surrounded by posies and tinkling fountains. These same visitors, if they used their brains, should realize that anywhere from one to three thousand screwballs could not be turned loose in such beauty, as it would be trampled, destroyed, or defiled.

The courtyard we entered had high walls around and about, and two or three trees, gaunt, as it was still March and foliage had not appeared. The bare ground was pebbly and filthy, and the whole aspect was as bleak and depressing as any outdoor spot could be.

The patients I accompanied were from "short hall" which is what they call the extra violent half of sick bay. These women were like figments from a nightmare. They soiled themselves. They tore from themselves the shapeless dresses most short hall patients wear. They found rocks big enough to be dangerous missiles and hurled these at one another. Some climbed trees, others attempted to scale the walls, while still others engaged in brief, vicious fights. Many talked to themselves while rolling in the dirt. Others screamed and cursed horribly. Some of them actually ate the dirt and other unpleasant things they found on the ground. It was too sickening to be borne by a sane mind, and I

resolved to eschew fresh air if it must be gained at such a cost.

That same afternoon I was asked to escort a patient to Hydro for a bath and change. The patient was a silent, katatonic girl who was forever in a camisole. I neither liked nor disliked her, but knew I'd smelled more fragrant people.

I've heard that katatonic people, if they recover, remember all that they experience while in this log-like state. Possibly then I made a mistake in addressing this girl in the wheedling, sickening, wholly patronizing tones adults generally use on defenceless babies and animals.

She seemed like a robot as she walked obediently to Hydro. Once there, I told her to sit down while we awaited the arrival of the nurse who would bathe her. I kept a firm grip on her bound shoulder, averting my head to smell her the less. The girl's state was so utterly trance-like I never dreamed she'd be dangerous. Something made me turn my head, and I saw to my horror she was about to sink her teeth in my wrist. I snatched my hand away, but had to grab her to prevent her falling. Between the camisole and her abused circulation she couldn't sit unaided. I held her, but kept my hands safely out of the range of her teeth. Then, to my shocked dismay, she began to spit in my face! Again and again she spat. I had to retain my grip on her, but turned my face as far as possible. What added to my abhorrence, I knew she suffered from trench mouth *and* syphilis.

When the nurse entered, we must have presented quite a tableau. The patient, with a venomous expression, was spitting repeatedly and accurately at me and, while I held her at rigid

arms' length, tears of incredulous dismay streamed down my face.

The nurse told me to go wash my face with green soap.

Months of this could unsettle any sane person. Never a moment's quiet, never a bit of privacy. Attendants in these places frequently lose their minds, even though they return to normal living each night. And always they have the comforting knowledge that they can walk out at a moment's notice — whenever the going gets too tough. But we were locked in with them twenty-four hours a day, bathing, eating, sleeping— no respite.

If I felt I'd hit a new low in unpleasant jobs, I underestimated the resourcefulness of the charge nurse, whose dislike of me never abated.

She transferred me to short hall to work, among the very violent. My pals consoled me.

"At least you are not transferred clear off sick bay!"

We liked to work on sick bay for several reasons—chiefly because we could get a light at any time between dawn and seven at night. On the wards the attendants were instructed to light cigarettes but three times daily. For another reason, sick bay afforded a view, from one of its rooms, of the hospital's entrance. We considered this an asset when we were expecting company. Lastly, in this place one can keep an accurate finger on the pulse of the hospital; one knows exactly who is admitted and why—and when they leave. Lest I forget, from sick bay one can view the visitor's patio and stare at each others' company endlessly, to a running fire of

comment, mostly uncomplimentary, about each others' relatives and sweethearts.

Despite these undeniable attractions, short hall was a bitter blow for me. There were three of us who worked there at that time, big gals all—and one of us was a sweetheart of a dangerous lunatic. The second girl, Alma, was grand, and my mainstay.

"I don't know what you are doing up here at this end," she told me more than once. "Regardless of what they may say, being assigned to work here is considered punishment, and darned if I know what you've done. I guess it's just because Miss Ronaldson hates you so. I know why I'm here. I was something of a pet when I first came and everyone was very good to me. Then, at my husband's request, I was allowed to go home for a day's visit and I came back that night roaring drunk. I've been in the doghouse ever since. Incidentally, although I had done two months already, my time started over. I'm lucky if I get out of here in six months!"

Our duties were about the same as the other girls, except that we were in proportionately more danger and saw unpleasant things more unremittingly. First thing in the morning we separated from the other girls, going to the other half of the rectangle that was sick bay. There were eight or ten cells to be cleaned on short hall, but this didn't mean we had but eight or ten patients. Each morning the more violent and noisy and messy patients were chased up the hall from the sick bay half to spend the day with us, and worse yet, for a time each morning and evening, twenty or thirty patients from Ward 4, the most violent ward in the whole hospital,

would be sent over to remain in our custody for an hour or so.

When these dilies were on our hands the fun began. I tried to save my towel folding for these periods, because this was a task that permitted me to have my back to the wall and my eyes free.

On sick bay some of the nurses had been sweet to me and addressed me as an intelligent well-mannered adult expects to be addressed. On short hall the regular attendants, one and all, treated me as though I were some sort of vermin it was their misfortune to have to endure. They never allowed me to rest. If I sat down for a moment, they'd invent some errand. If they had once smiled and spoken pleasantly, possibly my heart would not have been so heavy within me. These days were so tortuous that one morning my whole being rebelled. I was washing the legs of a girl who was tied in bed.

"This is no existence," I thought sullenly. "Since I have to be in a madhouse I wish I were mad. It's too much to expect of a sane person to be in this environment for months without cessation of the horror and pain. Some of these crazy people seem very content. They dance and laugh and don't give a damn."

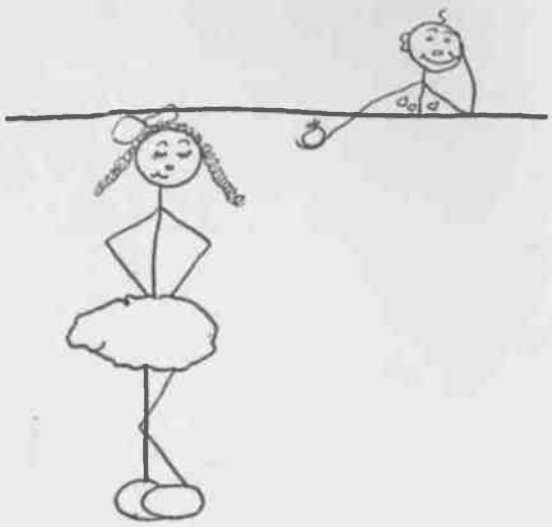
I stared out of the cell's dirty, heavily steel-meshed window. My thoughts ran on.

"Of what good is it here?" I asked myself desperately. "To have your sanity — to have every faculty alert, when those same faculties receive nothing but repugnant impressions? I wish I were one of these uncaring insane too!"

The morning haze lifted and a small patch of blazing California sun came through.

I looked pityingly down on the bound, incoherent girl on the bed.

"No," I thought. "No!"



"Soon I Became Involved in a 'Camarillo Romance'"

CHAPTER VII

Soon I became involved in a "Camarillo Romance". It began on one of those seemingly hopeless days when mental and physical weakness overcame my more or less steadfast resolve to keep a "stiff upper lip". A succession of petty injustices and inordinately repellent tasks sent me, all teary-eyed, into the luncheon lineup.

The girls had pointed out to me which men workers in the cafeteria were drunks and which were screwballs. The second time I had visited the cafeteria the men had called me by name. They lose no time finding out all about a new gal, and they do this by the simple expedient

of asking the sick bay girls in charge of the food cart. They not only get the new patient's name and why she is committed, but they find out from the diet kitchen girls whether the new patient is a good egg or a pain in the neck. I must have received a favorable sendoff, for the boys always greeted me pleasantly. Most of the attendants didn't object to friendly greetings exchanged, or a brief remark or so between the men and women. After all, we got acquainted at the occasional dances and it was only natural that we should pass commonplace remarks.

On this occasion I stumbled, blinded by tears, down the line, sniffling unprettily into my hankie as I went. A man alcoholic's gaze sharpened as he saw me, and he shook his head sadly, at the same time surreptitiously slipping a piece of cake onto my tray.

Few women look attractive when they cry, but I manage to look downright hideous. So I was touched, to say the least. That night, at dinner, I found a note from the same man on my tray. It read: "Dear Wilma—you looked so pitiful crying I wanted to do something to make you brighten up. Here's some cheese for you. Please don't cry any more—this won't last forever."

The note was unsigned, but I knew already that his name was Philip. His note, to me, was an open indictment. The man plainly intimated that I let appetite rule my emotions. Events, though, proved him right. Each meal thereafter, he placed some trifle on my tray to lighten the monotony of the endless Camarillo beans. This hospital is one place where the doctors do *not* recommend fresh fruits and vegetables, milk

and eggs, fresh air and sunshine, rest and recreation, nor a complete change of scene!

Philip wrote me later that never again was he forced to see my eyes look so "wistful", as on the day he first noticed me.

Of course, I dropped him a coy note of thanks, and our correspondence became a regular thing. It is amazing how well two people can come to know one another via the weak medium of three notes exchanged daily. As blunt candor has always been my failing or virtue, according to the viewpoint, I told him all about Ricky and he, in turn, told me of the tribulations that had led to his commitment.

One morning, in the section, I sang an improvisation:

"Oh thanks—for the memory,
You've got us locked up here—
Away from wine and beer—
Away from gin—away from sin, and all
that we hold dear—
Oh thank you—so much."

"Go ahead, write us a song like that," suggested Letty, amused.

"All right," I agreed cheerfully, "find me a piece of paper."

She gave me one; but I had to leave her then to go take care of "Grandma", a job I evaded whenever possible. We called Grandma "Buttercup" and viewed her with aversion. She messed herself five or six times daily, and had to be changed throughout—a job we all went to elaborate lengths to avoid.

When I'd changed Grandma's diapers, I began pushing the heavy waxer up and down the short

hall corridor, an endless task the nurses insisted upon if I had no other task more imperative. Whenever the attendant disappeared into a cell for a few minutes, I'd pause and scribble another stanza on my parody. Before long it was finished, and when next I had an errand down on sick bay side, I gave it to Letty. It ran:

THEME SONG FOR WARD 6, DORMITORY 4

Thank—for the memory,
You've got us locked up here—away from
wine and beer—
Away from gin—away from sin—and all that
we held dear,
Oh thank you—so much.

Oh, many's the time that we've held them,
And many's the time that we've quelled them—
I mean the daft—we spank them aft—
Then grip like hell—while they yell—

Oh thanks——for the memories—
Of Camarillo stew and mopping out the goo
Of "disturbed" souls and "camisoles"—Good God,
and Grandma, too—
Oh thank you—so much.

Oh thanks—for the memories,
Of lingerie by "State"—floor-wax by the crate—
Of eating starch each day in March but never
from a plate!
Oh thank you—so much.

Oh, we said goodbye to our highballs—
And now we're as fit as a fiddle—
But still we don't sing of hi-diddle—
We can't (catch on), we're here too long—

Oh, thanks—for the memories,
Of bright spring afternoons—when we herd
the loons,
Of loose screw-balls and waxing halls, and
sterling salad SPOONS—
Oh thank you—so much.

Oh thanks—for the memory—
Of bathing twice a week—and bathing jowl
by cheek—
With forty nuts with weird-shaped butts
Whose torsoes simply reek—
Oh thank you—so much.

Oh thanks—for the memory—
Of getting up at dawn—with scarcely time
to yawn—
We're hard at work, we dare not shirk—
Oh say, DOES TIME MARCH ON?
Oh thank you! FOR SUCH!

Copies of this ditty spread over the hospital like wildfire. I heard about it by the time I went for my next meal in the dining room. Nearly all the patients and attendants there had copied it. But eventually some idiot showed it to the powers-that-be, and then I was *really* in the doghouse.

There were two places in which one could entertain visitors—in the sunny patio, beside the fountain, or in the large, comfortably furnished reception room by the front office. This visitors' room had a window, high in the wall, which looked into short hall. One of my nefarious practices was to push my polisher beneath this window, and whenever the attendant would be out of sight, stand on the polishing block, which would give me enough altitude to peer through the window to see if my company had arrived.

Once an alcoholic had her sweetheart visit her, and while they were talking in this reception room he noticed the window and asked her casually where it led. She rolled her eyes significantly and told him that was where the really wild ones were kept. At this critical moment I peered through and gave him a really malevolent stare—because he wasn't Ricky, My friend the patient later claimed her sweetheart hadn't been right since!

Another time I looked through the same window and saw a mental patient having company. I waved to her, and she happened to glance up and wave back. Then my head withdrew, and I didn't realize until much later that the poor thing's company probably asked her why she waved, and then when they turned and viewed the empty and dangerously high window, they probably secretly decided that their dear demented was still "seeing things" and not ready to come home from the hospital.

A matter we argued endlessly was whether or not we were given saltpetre. There was a faint but definitely unpleasant odor that clung to us. Bad as the food was, we didn't feel that could

cause it and of course we didn't all have the same medication. In fact, most of us had no medication. This distasteful scent was detectable in our clothing and hair, and we all complained of tasting it in our throats upon arising.

Some attendants told us "Sure it was in the food", but the majority denied it. A patient who had been there a long time asserted that the previous summer the governor of the State had visited the insitution, and had spent a goodly time in the kitchen to insure the stuff was not used. But shucks, they could have started in again. After a few weeks we no longer noticed the odor, and decided the hospital had used saltpetre but had recently stopped. Or, we argued that possibly we had just become accustomed to the odor. But Letty scoffed, "Naw—no one could get used to that stink!"

Around Psycho, jail, and Camarillo, I gained the reputation of being a shade stupid because I did not answer readily to the name Wilma—nor yet Wilson. There was a very good reason for this, but one I could not easily explain. Wilma Wilson was tantamount to an alias for me. After christening, the "Wilma" was abandoned by my family and they always called me Billie. And while "Wilson" was, I suppose, my legal name, it seemed strange to me. When mother had me arrested she had not wanted to disgrace the good old family name, so she had resurrected the name of my brief and long-dissolved marriage. Even during marriage I had used my maiden name, and should I use it here, it would be rather widely recognized in Los Angeles, where I was born and schooled, and gained a small measure or recognizance or

notoriety, as one prefers, from motion picture work and later ebbuulient escapades.

I showed stupidity in other ways, too. I had actually opened my mouth when a nurse advanced on me with a thermometer. There are several ways to take temperatures, and I should have known the hospital would employ the least pleasant! (There's a very good reason for this, of course, but they could make an exception with sane patients!)

In a mental hospital each patient's actions and remarks are reported on charts, for the psychiatrists to ponder; and strange and delightful are some of the conclusions these good souls draw from the data on hand. When a patient is given to wise-cracking, as I am, trouble invariably ensues.

It would be wrong to state sweepingly that psychiatrists are devoid of humour, but there is apparently something in the nature of their pursuit that leaves them unduly suspicious of a patient's most innocent intent.

State funds are inadequate to provide for sufficient employees, so while attendants keep order and charts, the ambulatory patients do all the work of the hospital. The powerhouse, laundry, bakery, sewing room and farm work are all executed by patient power. Each doctor has an inmate secretary as well as an inmate housekeeper. And they employ patients in the offices, around the files. (If you think, under these conditions, it is possible to keep any case histories secret—you're crazy and had better enroll in Camarillo next semester.)

Later during my stay I was to have the enjoyable experience of having an office-working

patient report my exact history to me—and some of the conclusions the Staff drew concerning me caused me great hilarity.

As has been related, the doctor in charge of sick bay had talked with me several times and I'd been given a Wassermann—this last despite the fact that Psycho had given me the routine Wassermann but a few days previously. This is customary as one is County and the other State—my health wasn't questioned.

Next I was called to surgery to be vaccinated, although I explained that the Army had given me the medical works before I had been permitted to cross the Pacific in an Army transport two years before. Apparently nothing a patient says is believed—not even when the patient is sane.

Now I was to have a physical examination, and wondered which doctor would give it to me. Dr. Milland was in charge of sick bay, but I lived on Ward 6 and my official doctor was now Dr. Tompkins, a woman.

Camarillo had two women doctors during my stay. Both of them were very young and attractive. In fact, the first time I saw one of them, I thought she was the high school sprig of some attendant, who was visiting her mother during working hours! When Ricky later saw this same pretty little doctor, he claimed to have become violently enamored of her, and always pretended to run a temperature when he was near her—in hope he'd receive medical aid at her hands.

The year prior to entering Camarillo, I'd suffered a siege of rheumatic fever, and now I found that the arduous polishing brought back

vague rheumatic pains. Frightened, I'd requested an interview with my ward doctor. She was kind, and prescribed a course of salicylates for the condition, reminding me that alcohol was not beneficial for such an ailment. This information was unnecessary, as my own intelligence had long ago discovered that the use of alcohol is not beneficial in any respect. What I would have appreciated from her would have been advice on how to carry through a course of conduct my intelligence subscribed to. But I merely thanked her, and was more than prepared to like my doctor as I've always admired professional women—or, for that matter, any woman of signal accomplishment.

My official doctor's schedule must have been too full, for it was Dr. Milland who gave me the physical exam, ably abetted by one of the two R. N.'s that Camarillo boasts.

From force of habit the nurse lassoed me with a sheet in the binding fashion they secure possibly dangerous mental patients. Now they really had me, and the doctor assembled his tools. Just between us, I think the doctor dabbles in woodcraft and a dash of plumbing during slack periods — you never saw such utensils. First he went all over my back and chest with one of those "plumber's helpers", next he took my pulse for a quarter minute, did some rapid mental compound interest and arrived at the market reports. Then he wrapped endless lengths of dispirited-looking grey ribbon around my arm and began an apparently fascinating game with a bulb and meter. How he could tell my blood pressure from this is beyond me, as the needle never settled, but fluctuated happily

if erratically. I guess a doctor just takes his choice.

The doctor had an assortment of needles, and he tapped me hither and yon until I felt like a maple syrup tree. Or maybe he was prospecting for oil. Next, with a rubber hammer, he played patty-cake with my knees. Knowing why he did this, I awaited his findings with interest, as my commitment had raised doubts! The doctor then threw lights in my eyes— a sort of medical third degree. He tickled my feet, too. This wasn't a pleasantry. As he bent zealously over this task, he was somewhat taken aback to hear me inquire archly:

"How's my Babinski phenomenon, Doctor?"

Now he grabbed me when I wasn't looking, and began to knead my stomach. He belatedly, if politely, explained why, but I'd just once like to meet a doctor who has even heard of the Marquis of Queensbury!

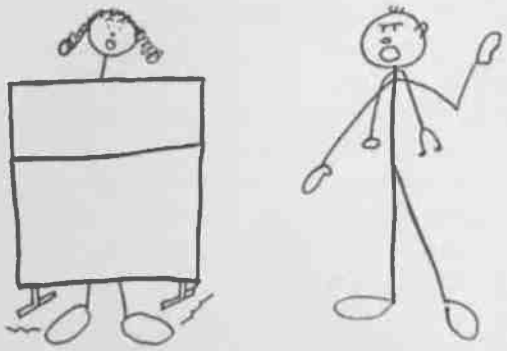
What he did to me after this I'm too much of a lady to relate.

While I was recovering my composure, he brightly took up the question of my teeth. He went over these so carefully one would think I was Sea-Biscuit. Nor was the doctor's repertoire yet exhausted. With an index finger I must stab my nose with my eyes shut. I must walk around the room. As I'd left the blind staggers up in psycho, I jumped this hurdle triumphantly. I had to repeat after him, "Basket of vegetables" and "Methodist Episcopal".

Here the doctor apparently ran out of games, which was just as well—I was exhausted. He started out of the room, that the nurse might help me dress, when he paused and I perceived

him to be staring with horrified fascination at my feet.

"Do you always paint your toenails?" he asked, in the manner of one who'd whisper, "How long ya been on the stuff, kid?"



"Do You Always Paint Your Toenails?"

CHAPTER VIII

Both of the regular short hall attendants were off duty the next morning when I reported for work. The two relief women greeted me kindly which was a pleasant shock, and asked me what was the customary procedure.

"First Enid and I sweep the cells," I explained, "then we mop them with antiseptic, dry the floors and change all bed linen. The rest of the day we wax the corridor, while unruly patients wax the big day hall. There is another responsible patient working here, but she is confined to her ward for a few days as she is suffering from ringworm. That leaves just the two of us. Enid cleans the section and I run errands and feed the helpless patients and help you whenever someone has to be held, etc."

In short, I told the nurses the exact truth. In the two weeks or better that I'd been working around there, I'd seen the cells waxed but once, and that one time was but two days previous. Naturally, I concluded waxing cells was a monthly or bi-monthly task.

We all worked hard, but I missed Alma very much. She was the big girl who had lent me so much moral support, the one who had made the

mistake of returning drunk to the hospital after a day's outing.

At one time when the attendants made life especially miserable for me I actually tried to catch ringworm from her by rubbing my foot against her affected leg, that I too might stay on the ward away from the petty persecutions of short hall. But luck was agin me, and I didn't catch ringworm.

Later this morning the doctors made their rounds, and it must have been "one of those days" due for a general uproar. The powerful Staff started grumbling about the "unsightliness" of the place, and a dressing-down started at the top of the crest, from the doctors to the chief matron, who bawled out the sick bay charge nurse (goody), who bawled out the short hall nurses, who bawled out me, who bawled out the nuts who didn't know what I was talking about.

It seems the cells should be waxed every day. The regular attendants didn't have this done, but fortunately for them they could claim I neglected this task in their absence. To make matters worse, a much-petted mental patient complained to the sick bay charge nurse that the cells hadn't even been mopped, which was a barefaced lie. I taxed the mental patient with this.

"Arline," I said, reproachfully, "whatever made you say the rooms weren't mopped? You know they were, and you'll get these new nurses in trouble by lying."

She refused to look me in the eye, but shrugged and walked away. Arline was strong as a bull and weighed almost two hundred

pounds, although paradoxically, she suffered from tuberculosis and syphilis. My relations with her had always been amicable and I'd given her cigarettes, and certainly had never feared her. I was too prone, as always, to forget that however calmly she acted, she was still insane.

Hospital dwellers are so insular and petty that the whole personnel became embroiled in this argument. Nurses from the sick bay end wandered up to discuss the matter pro and con. I defended the relief nurses, which did them no good, in view of my unpopularity.

I never dared to sit down during my thirteen hour duty, except in the section, so I retired there, climbing up on the towel box to enjoy a long overdue cigarette and to ponder this petty bickering. There were about five patients in the section, wrangling violently. Suddenly my attention became focused on reality and I viewed this whole scene with amazement, gazing at the nightmare spectacle before me.

"If anyone had told me a few weeks ago," I said to myself with awe, "that I would be alone in a room with several violent maniacs, and taking it all so calmly that my eyes would be looking out the window completely indifferent to the lunatics' intent, I should not have believed it!"

Luncheon time came. I always dreaded having to spoon feed the stubborn, malodorous patients, but it had to be done. For those who still refused to eat beyond threats and coaxing, there was a wooden feeding-stick which was used to pry open their jaws. When a patient still rejected food, she was fed through a nose

tube. If she would immediately vomit this I imagine saline-glucose was next in order, but I never saw that method of feeding employed in Camarillo. Upon first seeing a patient tube-fed, I was sickened, but realized, of course, that such extreme measures were necessary. The feeding stick, too, must have been unpleasant, but necessary if a patient insisted upon being intractable.

Something happened now, however, which is to haunt me the rest of my days. I accompanied the nurse, as was customary, to act as stooge and auxilliary power, in her round of cells at mealtimes to feed those in "restraint". The nurse was the handsome Amazon whose husband was supervisor on the men's side.

We came to my pet patient, the lovely Charlene, lying still bound and plaintive in her camisole.

"Now, Charlene," said the pretty attendant, in her deceptively soft, babyish voice which so perfectly matched her childishly attractive face, "aren't you going to eat for me today, dear? Look, I've some nice broth for you. You don't want that nasty old nose tube any more, do you?"

"Yes, I'll eat," said Charlene. True to mental patient form, however, she spat out the first mouthful.

"I have the feeding stick here," warned the nurse, "and I'll use it if you aren't good."

For a minute or so, Charlene would first promise to cooperate and then renege, trying our collective patience, of course. The second attendant, who had been hovering in the background, disappeared down the hall. Suddenly the nurse, who had been gently tapping Char-

lene's lips with the stick, became transformed with a sadistic rage. Never raising her gentle voice, talking steadily, she violently rammed the sharp feeding stick against the back of Charlene's throat and rested her entire weight on the stick. Blood foamed from the helpless youngster's throat, accompanied by a bubbling strangling sound hideous to hear.

Somehow I made my blind way to the section. Waves of nausea swept me. The walls reeled. Never again do I want to cry as I did then. I had not known sobs could be so painful or make one so physically ill. These sobs seemed to come shuddering up from my legs and to sear my lungs.

It was then Mrs. Babblanapp found me. Mrs. Babblanapp, a woman as difficult as her name, was the other attendant.

"Why, Wilma, what's the matter?"

Talking was almost impossible, but I managed to choke out something about the blood.

"Nonsense," she said briskly, "a big girl like you shouldn't take things so hard. When you see more of these patients you will learn that things like the feeding-stick are absolutely necessary."

I knew that. Nevertheless, the well-meaning woman had not seen the use of the feeding-stick abused as I just had, and I doubt if my word would have been taken.

A little later the battle of the unwaxed cells was raging again. I overheard the pretty attendant say, "Well, Arline says the cells weren't even swept, and I believe her and not Wilma, who claims they were. After all, Arline has been with us for a long time and she's not in here for

what that Wilma is in for!" This last was said in a shocked whisper.

Walking straight up to the nurse I stated again the exact facts because, not only was I getting a raw deal because of a mental patient's lie, but so were the two relief attendants. The pretty nurse locked at me coldly.

"I believe Arline, Wilma—I've never known her to lie."

Then the woman started discussing me as though I weren't there. As I kept hearing my name, I hovered close, thinking they expected me to join the discussion. Finally Mrs. Babblanapp told me sharply to get on with my polishing. "You are always," she said acidly, "looking for an excuse to loaf."

One feature of our work always afforded us wry amusement. When we'd report for work at six in the morning, or a little before, Miss Olsen, the night nurse, would still be on duty. She worked from eleven at night to seven in the morning. Her last hour, and our first, was a hustle, untying heavy and obstinate, frequently malicious patients, that they and their beds could be changed. I gladly threw myself into work with Miss Olsen because she was jolly, and one of the handful of nurses who spoke to me kindly. Then she'd be relieved and we'd work hard all day with the day crew. At three o'clock, when we'd be faintly delirious with fatigue, the evening crew would come on, rosy from rest and full of vim and vigor. "Come on, quit stalling," they'd tell us, energetically doling out more mops and polishers. "All you girls want to is lie down on the job!"

Probably these women didn't mean to be in-

considerate—they merely forgot that we worked with all three shifts!

Late that afternoon about twenty-eight of the rip-roaring bad ones from ill-famed Ward 4 were thrust on us for the customary evening hour. I was trembling and slightly nauseated from fatigue, my senses blurred, but I had early learned to be on the alert when these violent patients were with us. Many of them were in restraint, either camisole or cuffs, but the hospital never had enough camisoles to go around. In fact, these camisoles, stiff with blood and other unpleasantness from earlier wearing, were frequently put on patients simply because we had to have these garments before the laundry. Also, many patients out of restraint ran suddenly amok without sufficient warning to tie them up, and it was of these that we had to be wary.

As far as the rules of the hospital went, I don't believe any patient was supposed to help the attendants keep order. Regardless, all of us did help keep order. We did the State employee's work, without the State employee's salary, food, or freedom. And in short hall, a bad-tempered Russian woman who imagined she was running the joint, was indispensable. Always in her bathrobe, carrying a big counter-brush as a belaying pin—and using it as one—she wandered about all day cursing and abusing the other patients, starting fights and then breaking them up. When she got too vicious, the attendants languidly rose from their wicker chairs and remonstrated with her, but mostly they permitted her to quell riots that they should have handled. Possibly they allowed her so much latitude because of some fear of her themselves.

It must be confessed I tried to stay on her good side, buying her candy and fruit.

The patients from Ward 4 milled aimlessly around the big day hall. From time to time a fight would break out. If a fracas is started in a prison, or around the "man in the street"—especially around the "man in the street"—there is an immediate choosing of sides and mob spirit prevails. But in the bughouse, flareups are viewed with apathy by the other patients, and seldom do more than three mix in a battle at one time. It is this trait, among others, in mental illness, that allows the huge wards to be run with but two attendants on duty at one time.

One wild-eyed female kept coming up, tapping my shoulder and querying, "Does this boat stop at China?"

"Yes," I told her, each time more wearily, "but we must stop first in Honolulu."

Another woman asked me tensely if I were the Virgin Mary. I denied this hastily. "Then," she concluded gladly, "*I am!*"

The attendants chased one completely berserk patient into the section, that she wouldn't harm the others. They apparently forgot she was in there, for a few minutes later they opened the door of the section wide enough to throw in another incorrigible. I was told to stand at the section door to keep her in.

Shortly, through the door's ventilating slats, I could hear all hell break loose. The attendants were but two or three feet from me, across the corridor and just inside the door to the day hall, their big chairs flanking the door to keep the patients in the hall. They could hear the ruckus too, but they were busy talking and anyway,

one violent mental patient can make enough noise for a whole platoon, so they paid no attention. One of these patients in the toilet was a woman who incessantly repeated, "I'll kill-l-l, I'll kill-l-l," and then she'd add always something about a "dirty dog". Her voice was so remarkably guttural it was hard to distinguish her words at all—I'd been around her for several days before I realized that she was talking and not just snarling.

The noises within the section told that these two women were probably beating one another to a pulp, but I decided not to do a thing about it. It was the attendants' responsibility, and every time I ventured a suggestion they snubbed me anyway. I was afraid, exhausted, and very unhappy about the whole thing.

Now the racket reached a crescendo that even the engrossed attendants couldn't fail to note.

"Say, are there two of them in there?" asked an attendant, blankly. They rose and investigated, and I peeked from a safe vantage point behind their burly forms.

The section was a shambles. Blood was everywhere, even all over the walls. The patients were such pillars of gore as to be indistinguishable, and the weapon, which had apparently been amiably handed back and forth, was a metal chamber pot. They had so reduced its utility value as to make them both eligible for the proverbial criterion of poverty.

The participants were sent to surgery to be stitched up, and fortunately it was then time for the others to return to Ward 4. Our own patients had been put to bed and locked in, either on sick bay or short hall. The day hall was set to rights,

and though it was nearing seven and quitting time, they told me to resume the never-finished hall-waxing. Around the bend of the hall corridor I heard a faint "Ps-s-t". Investigating, I found a little old lady from sick bay, a motherly patient who felt sorry for me. In fact, my equivocal treatment at the hands of the attendants had aroused the pity of all the patients who noticed what went on about them. The old woman, a foreigner had in her hands a bowl of steaming hot milk.

"You drink," she urged solicitously. "Is good for you."

In my tired condition, I was touched; grateful tears came to my eyes. Gladly I drank, after which she stealthily returned down the hall to sick bay.

At seven the sick bay gang gathered at the door to Ward 5. It was time to go home. They called to me, but the pretty attendant appeared at my side and motioned for them to go on without me.

"Wilma hasn't finished polishing," she called. "She'll be along when she's done."

This was nothing but pettiness. She kept me not longer than five or ten minutes to annoy me, because the hall had been polished to the shimmering-point before noon. Each trifle has its cussing and repercussions in an institution. My being late that night in reaching Ward 6 made my home attendants slightly disgruntled. They hated to continually unlock the big front door for stragglers.

Once "home" I flopped into a comfortable chair the girls had been saving for me at the bridge table. When they asked the reason for

my lateness, I told them something I'd overheard earlier, when two of the Ward 6 nurses stopped at the sick bay door to gossip.

"Mrs. Dooley, our afternoon charge nurse, told Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Babblanapp that we sick bay workers couldn't wait to get home at nights to play bridge—that we acted like Ward 6 was a luxurious hotel. Mrs. Smith said if that was our attitude she wouldn't let any of us through the door so early tonight, but she unlocked it at seven anyway."

We all exchanged long resentful looks.

"Just think," said Alma, softly but bitterly, "We work like dray horses for thirteen hours a day, and yet they begrudge us this hour of relaxation."

At that, we found bridge-playing in such surroundings too difficult for real pleasure. Our small table was too high and the nice chairs far too underslung for business-like card dealing. One player or another always had a duty to perform around the ward; then there'd be the nightly call for "medicines", and if any of us needed medication we perforce joined this line-up. If we wanted a cigarette, we'd have to barge down the hall to the section; and whether we wanted a cigarette or not, at a quarter of eight we all went for one, because it was the last we were allowed. Furthermore, the women detailed to clean the ward were forever making us shift our chairs and the table so that they might give the floor its last going over for the day, and if all this wasn't sufficiently distracting, we had a hundred ward mates carrying on in approved insane asylum fashion.

But even if our bridge-playing was jerky and absent-minded, it provided us some pleasure, and the attendants resentment of our playing made us indignant.

Alma was anxious to hear a full account of the day's happenings on short hall.

"Believe it or not," she confessed, "I actually miss going to work. It's no fun sitting around this ward all day listening to the old ladies fight. Are the short hall attendants still pouring it on you?"

"Yes," I replied. "When mother visited me last Sunday, I told her the whole sad story about how my anxiety to please got me nowhere. Mother replied that she'd heard that they rub in rough treatment on you here the first few weeks to see if you can take it. Do you believe that is true?"

"God save me," moaned Alma, "from relatives and other outsiders who know all about how things are done in here. I've got some relatives like that, too. Listen, kid, I've been here for months and let me tell you, if they get it in for you they never let up. It won't get better, it'll get worse. My advice to you is to apply for a transfer at once."

"But if I ask for a transfer," I protested, "I'm afraid they'll put me to work in the laundry—and that would kill me."

"Yes, they might put you in the laundry," she agreed, "but even if they did, the laundry isn't so bad—at least it would be better than the kind of slave labor you're doing now."

"I might get the same treatment if I had some other job!"

"I don't think so. Most of the attendants

around the hospital are pretty good eggs. That sick bay bunch act mean, I think, because the charge nurse there sets them the example."

Upon consideration, Alma's advice sounded all right. Since I'd not been called before the board of doctors in the ordeal known as attending "Incoming Staff," I resolved to ask, when my turn came, for a transfer.

Certainly I was not the only patient who felt the displeasure of the termagant who ran sick bay. More than once patients who had been in the hospital for years explained how they dreaded an attack of illness acute enough to send them to sick bay, and they related unpleasant tales of the treatment they received while ill. This doesn't mean, of course, that they were beaten or abused physically, but they came in for large doses of sarcasm, inconsiderate treatment, and even downright neglect.

Alcoholics in Camarillo quickly become accustomed to contumely, for this sentiment seeps down from authority. One of the hospital's chief doctors despises the alcoholics; and an admitted tenet of the institution, regardless of what an alcoholic is promised by the committing board, is that an alcoholic is to receive no dental care, and no medical care unless it is a downright emergency. If an alcoholic has a toothache, the tooth is pulled. If a mental patient has a toothache, the tooth is filled. We were resigned to this cold attitude of neglect, but on sick bay, however, unkind treatment was not confined to the drunks. The mental patients had as many sad experiences as we did.

We had a tacit agreement among us not to believe anything the poor mental patients said,

even when we knew they were telling the truth, but as for their being disdainfully treated around sick bay, we who worked there saw it with our own eyes.

It was on this night I became ill. When the watch changed at eleven, our sharp-eyed but kindly night nurse, Miss Seton, walked up to my bed and asked in a whisper why I was awake. When I explained that I felt badly, she threw a glance of distaste around the dormitory where at least three patients were doing a sound job of snoring.

"No wonder you can't sleep, my dear," she said. "Help me carry your bed into the hall, that I may better keep an eye on you."

So began a strange night. The heart-beats of the hospital were audible in this nocturnal vigil. On the hour the attendant would enter her office and speak into the telephone, "Seton —Ward 6". Evidently this was a precaution for nurses on duty alone. The hideous nightly clamor from sick bay and Ward 4 was muted—far-off and eerie. The cars of employees swished occasionally down the highway. A band of coyotes in the near wildnerness unleashed their yelpings in weird mockery of the mad. The attendant alternated her chart reports with frequent patrolling, her rubber-soled footsteps and alert flashlight lending her the paradoxical appearance of a legitimate marauder, of respectable stealth. I would have liked to have shared the lonely reaches of the night chatting with her to ease the intolerable despondency that a patient in such a place feels, but fearing this would be against the rules, as everything seemed

to be, I feigned sleep whenever duty led her past me.

As sleep eluded me speculation about "rules" engrossed me for a time. Continually we were called to task for this infraction or that. We broke rules incessantly, sometimes knowingly, more often in complete innocence. For example, when I discovered a sharp hunger would assail me about nine in the morning, I formed a habit of carrying two or three slices of bread back from the cafeteria. I did this openly until warned it was against the rules, then I did it surreptitiously. We did not know it was against the rules to wander into the other dormitories on our ward while bidding friends goodnight. When we were told not to, we desisted. Once Letty's husband visited her and had to leave before the visiting hours were over. Naturally the sick bay doors were locked. Letty crossed the patio and called through a sick bay window, asking an attendant to admit her. She was sharply reprimanded for this. Her husband should have had the *office* telephone sick bay.

As for passing notes to the men patients, instinct warned us this was against rules—certainly no official ever told us. We learned later it was wrong for girls on one ward to write notes to girls they knew on other wards. If the context of the message was decent, it perplexed us that inter-hospital correspondence was regarded as a crime.

The hospital would surely have received more intelligent co-operation if each patient had received a mimeographed sheet of rules on admission to the place.

My reflections became more disjointed as the dark fused with dawn.

Shortly before five in the morning, Miss Seton took my temperature. It was normal, so I prepared for work despite the giddiness caused by lack of sleep.

Her kindness had made a deep impression on me and upon reaching short hall, I related to the attendants her thoughtfulness. Then I learned that the petty malice of the institution was not confined to the belittling of patients. Both of the short hall attendants, in the presence of several patients, jeered at my praise of Miss Seton. They assured me I wouldn't think her so sweet if I had ever heard her answering them on the telephone when they had occasion to make a request of Ward 6. One or two of the patients submitted an unfavorable opinion of Miss Seton, and these opinions were enlarged upon by the attendants. I said nothing, but my conception of institutional morale and discipline was lowered.

A little later, sent for a load of sheets, I paused at Miss Ronaldson's and asked her directly why I had been detailed to short hall.

"I couldn't have anyone as rackety as you, Wilma, down here with the sick people. I put you on short hall where you could romp with the noisy ones."

"Miss Ronaldson, I've really tried, but up there it seems whatever I do displeases the attendants. If you'll let me work here I assure you you'll never have cause to complain of my conduct again."

"No, I can't do it. Besides, I've no one to assign to short hall."

That was that. It crystallized my resolve to ask for a transfer when called to "Incoming Staff".

Passing Hydro, staggering a little under the heaviness of the load of sheets, I saw the door open, and Gloria beckoned me in. With her in the big bath chamber was the hydro-therapist, who worked from mid-afternoon until almost midnight, giving the intricate "continuous baths" to highly disturbed patients. "Continuous bath" is the name for a treatment often prescribed for a disturbed patient in preference to internal sedatives. The treatment consisted of packing the patient tightly in wet sheets, which eventually soothes a person into a soporific state.

"How would like to swap jobs with me?" asked Gloria.

"Why?" I returned, surprised.

We've been watching the way they treat you and you look as if you are about to break under it. I've known all these attendants a long time and they wouldn't treat me unfairly."

"Do you want me?" I asked the hydro-therapist. She was a pleasant woman whom I had helped often, dragging berserk patients to and from Hydro.

"I think you are a very nice girl, Wilma, and personally I find you very competent. I'd be glad to have you. You and Gloria could change jobs for a few weeks, anyway, long enough for them to get out of the habit of carping at you."

"Would they let us?"

"Well, I could ask Dr. Milland to assign you to me. After all, the hospital wants patients to work where they'll be happiest and cause the least friction."

"But Gloria," I worried, "I'm afraid you are too little for short hall duty. Some of those patients can get very tough."

"Don't worry about me," said Glory grimly. Later I was told that the aberration from which she suffered was melancholia. It was hard to believe this, as she had a really well-developed sense of humor, frequently displayed.

"Anyhow," she added, "this Hydro job requires plenty of muscle. Don't think that just because you'll have a nice boss you won't have to work like a horse. All these walls must be scrubbed down, the floor, showers and tub scoured, and we get the cream of the crop in here as regards fighting patients."

"Hard work doesn't daunt me," I fervently assured the two young women before me, "and I'd cheerfully work my fingers to the bone for a boss as kind as you've always been," I told the Hydro nurse. She was not, of course, the nurse who had supervised my initial shower. That had been the attendant of the feeding-stick mayhem. This Hydro nurse dealt only with ill or refractory patients, and was very capable in administering the soothing wet sheet packs.

We agreed not to mention this plan until the doctor had been consulted. But we reckoned without the omniscient grapevine. That night, still lugging sheets, I passed the sick bay office. Hearing my name, I eavesdropped. Miss Smith, the night charge, was angrily repeating our idea to Miss Ronaldson.

"H-m-m," said the virago, "what does that woman in Hydro think she's doing — running sick bay? I'll just speak to Dr. Milland about

it first!"

Heartsick, I paused at the Hydro door and told Gloria and the hydrotherapist that we might as well abandon the idea.

It was then a letter came for me. Noting the return address, I tore it open prayerfully.

"Dear Madam:

Your request of March 11, 1939 for a jury trial received.

A jury trial in your case is not a constitutional right, but a right which must be granted you by statute. The present statute only grants jury trials to insane persons committed. Judge Munsey is therefore unable to comply with your request, even should he desire to do so.

Yours very truly,

"What does that make you?" laughed Letty.

"It makes me," I returned bitterly, "the only certified sane screwball not at large!"

CHAPTER IX

At last—Incoming Staff. Instead of polishing the short hall corridor, I tremulously sat there in the Tuesday Staff line-up, because they utilized the visitors' room for the meetings.

The sea-lawyers, of course, had again done thorough priming, but they had not prepared me for such a chill reception as I received. With my newly-acquired hangdog cringe, I felt the frostiness was directed at me, but later learned that it is against custom for the Staff members to show warmth to alcoholics.

All of the doctors were there, together with the chief matron and a stray woman who was indubitably a welfare worker. None of the doctors smiled, but Dr. Milland spoke very pleasantly.

"Why are you here, Wilma?" was the opening gun.

"For drinking when I should have been thinking."

Instantly I repented this cheap flippancy. Years of hiding pain and bewilderment under a brittle patina of facetiousness, however, proved too strong. The atmosphere of the room violated

a law of physics and congealed yet three more degrees.

A doctor then asked what kind of work I was doing around the hospital and if I liked it.

Hesitantly I replied: "If it is possible for you to transfer me, I'd appreciate it greatly. I'm not afraid of work, but I can't overcome my fear of certain of the patients on short hall. This same fear renders me useless to the nurses when any fracas takes place."

The doctors made no comment, but this was not surprising. So far as is known, they've never given a direct answer to a patient during Staff meeting.

The doctor in charge of Staff then told me my commitment was four months to two years, and he asked if I were willing to stay. A wild, almost irresistible desire welled in me to say "No", just to see what would happen, but I overcame it and said fearfully, "I hope it won't be more than four months."

He mumbled, "Come up in four months for an interview."

That was all. The dread "Staff" was over for me.

Back at work I found the battle of the unwaxed cells rekindled. I leaned my cheek on the polisher handle and said something to my co-worker, the big, very crazy Enid, about Arline's lie. Arline, coming down the hall, overheard me and charged toward us, bellowing, "Who's taking my name in vain?"

For some days now, Arline had been on the verge of becoming "disturbed", and she was rapidly entering the excited stage. Her normally powerful voice was deepening even more,

a physical change frequently noted in mental patients.

When she drew abreast of us, her last vestige of control snapped. She suddenly leaped forward, wrested the polisher from me, and with incredible ease, raised its dangerous bulk straight above her, maneuvering to bring it shatteringly down on my skull. I was frozen in my tracks when Enid, with a joyful snarl, closed in on Arline, shoving me safely aside as she did so.

Honesty compels me to admit regretfully that Enid was not motivated by any slightest regard for me. She was too crazy to give anything or anyone lucid thought. She was merely spoiling for a good fight.

The embattled women were well matched. Each was about five feet ten in height, and neither had a fashionable silhouette. Aghast, I watched this titanic struggle. The attendants hesitated to interfere until they were reinforced, as they almost immediately were, by nurses from the sick bay end. Arline was hustled into her cell, which they locked.

This little episode, instead of tending to corroborate my statement as to Arline's unreliable version of the "neglected cells", boomeranged to me, as usual. The nurses decided my "lying" had made "poor Arline disturbed".

That afternoon I was witness to an amusing by-play. An attendant from Ward 4 stopped to gossip.

" . . . . And so she throwed it on the floor," said the visiting nurse describing one of her patient's conduct with a tray.

Anna, one of our regular patients, equipped with a camisole and a hurricane-deck voice,

glanced up from the floor, where she was customarily seated.

"Threw it on the floor, you mean!" she roared.

The visiting nurse gave her a disgusted look. "I wish you was dead!" she snorted.

Anna was unperturbed.

"*Were* dead is correct!" she thundered.

The polishing must go on, and naturally, it led past Arline's cell. Unfortunately for me, the small glass pane used for inspection purposes had been kicked out of her door. When I passed the first time she hurled a good-sized shoe at me. Knowing the other would inevitably follow, I baited it out with the old hat-on-a-stick trick. Both shoes missing me, I felt at ease. But I relaxed too soon. Arline took to spitting at me. As she was tubercular, this made for complete revulsion. It is to be feared the floor wasn't painstakingly done in that area that morning.

Camarillo had a tubercular ward, but as I've stated, Arline was a pet, and was allowed to remain on short Hall, where she liked the nurses and the excitement. (It seemed to me barbarous that the State could compel a sane, unpaid I-A to work for four months in the "tubercular ward". True, gauze masks were worn, but often, due to the exigencies of working around berserk people, it was necessary to dash into the T. B. ward to protect some small patient, with the worker having no time to don a mask.)

That night it took five people, including one male attendant, to put the completely uncontrollable Arline to bed. And the next morning, to illustrate the strength of the insane, she had

thrown off all her restraint straps and had taken apart her bed!

Naturally, her venom was directed at me. Her door reverberated under her furious onslaughts until it seemed even its massive strength must give. The whole hospital could hear her virulent promises to "get" me.

"If I don't get that redheaded bitch here on earth," she howled, "I'll get her in hell!"

I didn't feel safe until locked in Ward 5 on the way to the cafeteria.

In the luncheon lineup, I encountered Gloria. My relief in being temporarily safe made me giddily hilarious.

"Will you dine with me, my dear?" I invited elegantly. We knew of course that we'd *have* to dine together, but she fell into the childish play.

"I'll consult my engagement book, and telephone you," she replied languidly, in best Junior League accents. "What is your prefix?"

"Case!" I rejoined with high glee. "I'm Case 3046!"

Returning to sick bay, I found the grim-visaged Miss Ronaldson standing at the door to admit us. When I tried to pass through, she stopped me abruptly.

"You don't come over here any more," she told me, as one who'd shut the door of the promised land.

Transferred! But *where*? I feared a Pyrrhic Victory!

Wheedling my way through the locked doors, I made my way "home" to Ward 6. Here I found Alma, alternating embroidering with rueful inspection of her ringworm territory. The

ward, seen in daylight, was delightful. Working on sick bay from before daylight until seven at night, seven days a week, gave us very little chance to become acquainted with our home. In fact, I'd not met the senior charge attendant of the ward, Mrs. Read, whose hours were from seven in the morning until three in the afternoon. Mrs. Dooley, she of the boycott on bridge, was transferred, and a likeable Mrs. Manley became afternoon charge until Mrs. Seton took over at eleven, being night charge.

True, the sick bay girls had the privilege of returning to the ward for two hours on two afternoons a week, but it was a privilege seldom demanded as most of us dreaded the ward edict prohibiting cigarette lights save after meals.

So now with pleasure I studied the graceful daytime grouping of the inviting wicker chairs, and the shifting pattern of sunlight on the dazzling floors. After the short hall biddies, my ward mates resembled members of the D.A.R. Contentedly I relaxed beside Alma, determined not to worry about where I'd be assigned to work.

Alma introduced me to our big shot, Mrs. Read. Mrs. Read had quizzical eyebrows and she scared the pants off me. By this time I had a conditioned reflex toward attendants; hence my attitude toward her was one of watchful wariness for several weeks, after which I decided that her supercilious brows were frauds concealing tenderness. I know, too, that eventually I won her affection and esteem.

The Chinese have a saying—"No roof is big enough for two women." Take over a hundred women, seventy-five percent of whom are deranged, and you have a reliable recipe for com-

bustion. Living on a ward was like living on a volcano with the hiccoughs.

The personalities of Ward 6 now became gradually familiar to me. There was Verna, a tall, dowdy girl who claimed she was a "religious nut". Actually she was a nymphomaniac and forever scribbling poetry. One of her poems entranced me, not with its own beauty, but because in it was an impassioned supplication to God to "no longer let her be a temptation to man." Reading it, and then viewing its gangling, beet-faced creator, was pitiful.

Another patient was the huge Mexican, Maria. She spoke no English, and I made the mistake of showing off to her my eight flawless sentences of textbook Spanish. Assuming that I was proficient in her mother tongue, her emotional Latin nature immediately melted. I was her "Guillerma" (Spanish feminine for William) and nothing should ever part us. She deluged me with such torrents of liquid Spanish that my ears flinched. Understanding only about every sixth word, it was soon obvious I'd started something I couldn't finish.

Once, in the cafeteria, a distressing scene indeed occurred. Maria, at the next table, leaned toward me and asked me to pass the mustard. She had always steadfastly refused to believe that I couldn't speak Spanish save for those damned eight sentences. I gazed helplessly about our table. I'd never known the Spanish word for mustard. (In fact, I still don't.) I offered her the salt—a cigarette — my tray — some of the toilet paper we used for napkins. Maria's expression became more granitely angry with each passing second. It never occurred to

me to pass the mustard because it was private property of some one else.

Finally Marie went into a noisy and complete collapse. She was inconsolable. Floods of crocodile tears, accompanied by Gargantuan sobs, filled the dining room. She dissolved in explosive selfpity. It took my last pack of cigarettes, an apple, and three interpreters to assure her her Guillerma hadn't intentionally scorned her.

Ward 6 had more alcoholics than the rest of the hospital, their number fluctuating between twenty and thirty. I doubt if there were more than fifty women I-A's in the entire institution during my stay. Not all of the Ward 6 drunks worked on sick bay, and from now on I was to be in a new—and close—little coterie of them, hob-nobbing with Elise and Letty only after seven in the brief, tired interval we had together before "lights out".

Chief among the ex-tipplers was a newcomer, Jo. Elise had introduced her to me, urging her, "Stick to Billie, she's okay and she'll never give you a bum steer."

I surveyed Jo with interest. She was two years younger than I, slightly taller, and seemed to consist entirely of eyes, arms, and legs. Although we were of an identical weight, we seemed dissimilar. Jo handled her limbs with such abandon as to remind me of the jumping-jacks made in kindergarten, those elongated little figures that dance a Highland fling when a concealed string is pulled.

She had an inexhaustible store of pure uninhibited fun, as well as unfailing sincerity and obvious moral courage. She was the mother of

two children, and her longing to see them was about the only thing that could quench her exuberant spirits.

Jo had been frail for years from thyroid deficiency. To rally her flagging spirits when the unremitting labor of housework laid her low, she learned to drink wine. At last realizing to what extent she relied on this stimulation, she was alarmed, and committed herself to Camarillo, where she was promised a month's rest.

"The kids' washing and ironing got me down," she confided, "and the doctor told me I shouldn't work for at least a month. I came here, hoping to rest and break myself of depending so on liquor. Now I find myself assigned to the laundry for four months!"

Jo and I became inseparable. Our long legs demolishing distance became a familiar hospital sight. There was a comfortable communion of spirit between us that made words unnecessary. We found the same things disgusting and the same incidents humorous. The fact that words were unnecessary between us does not mean we dispensed with them. Far from it! We chattered unceasingly, conferring endlessly on everything.

Then there was Cottontop, a diminutive platinum blonde in charge of the Ward 6 clothesroom. The clothesroom was invariably unlocked, and she had to hand to the inmates whatever they demanded from their boxes, so she had an interminable duty. Also she made up, by consulting a ward list, bundles of fresh clothing for everyone prior to the bi-weekly baths. Too, she kept the catamenial record.

We all grumbled plenty at being allowed to

bathe only on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Later I was to learn that we, the workers, were privileged. On most wards, the patients are given but one bath a week! Incidentally, bathing on the ward was not an unalloyed joy. The ward workers bathed in the mornings, the laundry workers in the afternoon, and the sick bay workers at night. There were four shower nozzles to handle all, so we were rushed in and rushed out. Also, to anyone with a well-developed esthetic sense, the experience was unpleasant because the room teemed with misshapen bodies. Jo and I discussed posting on the bathroom door a placard stating: *"Through these portals pass the most beautifully deformed gals in the world."*

Alma, Cottontop, Jo and I slept in the same dormitory and ate at the same table. We four sat at the front table—nearest the men and nearest the exit. Because each table seated six, our table was shared also by two mental patients. We could have scoured the hospital and not found two better nuts to break bread with. One was a pretty Mexican child, so silent as to be frequently considered a mute. The other was a tiny withered woman with a marked accent. Though more communicative than the Mexican girl, she, too, seldom spoke. She once told me she was a Turkish princess, but had been a circus bareback rider in this country. She may have been telling the truth; I never learned.

These two little screwballs were pleasant-mannered and understood so little of our idiom that we felt free to speak our minds, which was a comfort, because often our ward mates were under verbal fire, and we'd even relate gossip we had heard about the various attendants and

officers. When we had extra food, either bought or chiseled, our two nuts could not be induced to share, and they refused in such a manner to leave us with no sense of hurt or selfishness. Too, the Mexican child could be persuaded upon occasion to drop back to another table, without rancor, to allow us to have as "guest" some alcoholic or other we were anxious to eat with when plans were afoot.

Cottontop was a cute thing, good-humored, jolly, and sincere, but her cerebral calibre was not of the firmest. She herself would be the first to concur in this estimate. But she accepted in very good part the frequent gentle razzings we gave her for her slow perceptions. To give a perfect example: Mornings, she worked as secretary for one of the doctors, and one night she recounted to me a history she'd transcribed that day.

A male alcoholic, a waiter, had committed himself because after years of fairly uneventful tippling he had suddenly developed a healthy case of delirium tremens while at work. He plaintively described to the doctor how he had seen large, menacing looking lobsters and other denizens of the deep. He would approach a restaurant table and take an order for, say, prime ribs of beef. Once in the kitchen he would demand of the chef, "Lobster". When the latter delicacy would be forthcoming, he would hasten tablewards with it, and each time not be able to understand why it would be refused with such ire. Returning the lobster to the kitchen, he must face an outraged, combative chef.

So he signed himself in Camarillo.

"Cottontop — that's pricesless!" I exclaimed. "How I wish I had your job. Tell me all of that sort of thing you can remember in the future."

"Why?"

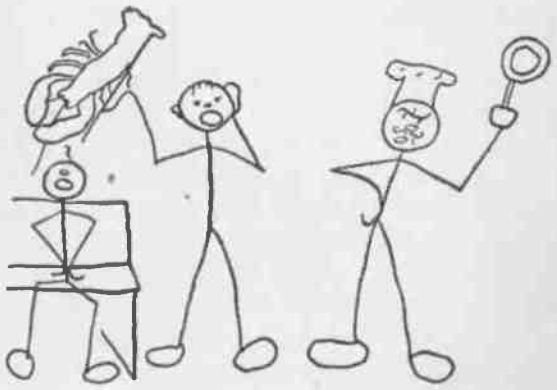
"Because I'd like to write a book about this place."

Cottontop looked dubious.

"I wouldn't write a book about the place if I were you, Billie."

"Why?'

"Because Dr. Connor, our conference doctor, is going to write one."



"Prime Ribs of Beef"

CHAPTER X

The laundry was my fate, too. I dreaded telling mother and Ricky on their next visit. I knew I would get exactly no sympathy, because there was too much poetic justice in it. At home I had worked very hard for many years to get out of the ironing, which I loathed, and here I was an official ironer. I would always cheerfully attack and demolish a huge washing—only to let it lie about awaiting ironing until it mildewed, or until, in sheer despair, some friend or relative would finish my task.

Probably I had a deep-rooted prejudice against laundries. My big sister, of beloved memory, had worked in the office of one when I was a snobbish sprig in junior high school. When people asked her where she worked, she'd reply, "At the ..... Laundry."

A stranger's first thought at such a statement is, of course, mangle work, and strangers would start with surprise at my obviously cultured sister's answer. She would read their thoughts and say, demurely, "I work at tub thirteen."

"Sister!" I'd wail, my adolescent false pride mortally lashed—"Don't! People might believe you!"

And here I was, not only a laundry worker, but a bughouse laundry worker. One's Nemesis is unerring. Furthermore, before long I resolved to find out what made the mangles tick. A paranoiac promised to show me how they worked. Why I wanted this is not clear, I suppose I was just bent on missing nothing.

The matron in charge of the laundry, Mrs. LeBrun, was a delightful surprise. Our first encounter contained great trepidation on my part, because the sick bay nurses had so deeply instilled in me a fear of the women in white. But she was a beautiful, gracious woman, tall and queenly, and she spoke to all of her employees as though she loved and respected them.

She directed me to one of the thirty ironing boards, which was henceforth to be my bailiwick.

"Have we a certain quota to iron daily?" I inquired, timidly.

"No, dear," she smiled. "This is not a commercial laundry. Just do your best. I appreciate quality work more than quantity.'

Now I was terrified. "I'm not a good ironer," I confessed.

"Well," she soothed, "I'll keep you on State dresses and patients' shirts, and let the experienced ironers do all the doctors' stuff."

The laundry was about a block from the hospital proper, and it was housed in a huge, sprawling building, roughly quartered. The two larger rooms were occupied by respectively, the women ironers and the men operators of washing-machinery. One of the smaller rooms contained finished bundles and the office while the last room was the always unpleasant receiving

department where the filthy incoming laundry was brought. But the whole structure was light and airy, and the hours were reasonable—seven-thirty in the morning until four in the afternoon. Furthermore, we had Saturday afternoons and Sundays off. What plutocrats! Before long, however, Jo and I begrudged every minute away from the laundry and Mrs. Lebrun.

Jo, the bum, got a white-collar job. When she was assigned an ironing board, she looked at it blankly and said, "I'm left-handed." True enough, she couldn't adjust herself to any of the boards. Should she try to iron facing the other direction, it would entail too much bumping of fannies with the next ironer. Mrs. LeBrun sighed and made her a distributor, to the accompaniment of many jealous, dirty looks from me. Before many days passed, Mrs. LeBrun thanked the good fortune that brought Jo to her. She made herself indispensable with her intelligent co-operation, and saved our loved Mrs. LeBrun many steps.

Polishing had left a nice crop of callouses on my hands, and soon the iron work had criss-crossed these with a set of tiny white blisters that burningly jeweled my palm. The most painful blister was on the outer side of my little finger and this, together with an aching shoulder caused by the heavy iron, was sufficiently anguishing to call for long rest periods. A feeling of guilt accompanied these spells of idleness. but I soon found other patients loafed equally, reading and even playing solitaire. Mrs. LeBrun was unperturbed. She noticed, of course, for she never missed a detail, but unless the patient carried laziness to an extreme, she never

remonstrated. On rare occasions when a patient's laziness became chronic, Mrs. LeBrun would give her warning, and if that didn't work, the patient was quietly assigned work in another department.

Running a laundry is no soothing racket at best, but when all of your employees are Grade A screwballs save for a handful of disgruntled drunks—you have something to cope with. Mrs. LeBrun had to sense when one of her employees was disturbed, about to be, or even considering it. She must have reminded herself often, so vast was her patience, that ninety percent of her workers were crazy and that they worked very hard for no return save their daily portion of beans and an occasional handful of bum tobacco. Mrs. LeBrun spent a great part of her salary buying presents for her workers—embroidery for this one, candy for another, a clever child's hankie for a mother's baby. To Jo and me, she gave something of infinitely greater value to us—her confidence. Her tact and compassion were boundless. Daily we watched her infinite consideration for all the loons, including the most unpleasant—and we loved her for it.

It's astonishing what can be discerned about people, merely by seeing their laundry. One of the doctor's shirts entranced me; they all had vivid wallpaper tendencies, or Christmas candy motifs.

Another time I was ironing a pair of men's pyjamas, silky in texture, magenta in hue, trimmed in cerise, complete with tassels. And they did not belong to one of the goofs; the name tape in the collar proclaimed their owner to be the husband of one of the hospital's four ma-

trons. But when I touched the hot iron to this sybaritic garment—and a sensous, delicate perfume emanated at once—I paused. My mental picture of our austere matron snuggling at night within those fragrant, flaming arms was too much for my none-too-stable risibilities. I fled section-wards hastily to be disturbed!

Handling the garments of the doctors' children was a pleasure. One doctor, the one who so detested alcoholics, had a baby girl a year old. What frocks that infant had, with their infinistesimal boleros and microscopic zippers!

The women doctors' apparel was so exquisite as to bring lumps of envy to our throats as we worked on them. Smart slacks, beach togs, and spectator sportswear that conjured visions of all we were denied.

We had occasion, from time to time, to carry on brief conversations with the men who worked near us. It gave the laundry more of an air of being a legitimate place of employment than the rest of the hospital, which was prison-like in its restrictions. Mrs. LeBrun saw everything, but she didn't object to the men and women exchanging words, if the privilege wasn't abused. For the most part, however, the men stayed on their side of the laundry, where through a huge door which was never closed, they could be seen at work. My ironing board was flush with this door, which led to an embarrassing situation.

A screwball fell in love with me. I realize I'm laying myself wide open for the retort obvious—but anyway, he did.

His name was Elmer; he fancied himself the hospital's star ball-player; and he was far from

beautiful. Posturing ludicrously, he would stand in this large doorway and between sending discretionary glances to locate our duenna, Mrs. LeBrun, he would indulge in the most absurd gyrations, a la Tom Sawyer, to impress me. Finding me unmoved, he resorted to the age-old dodge of suitors, and wooed me with love-tokens. All day long he would hurl, in my general direction, gifts intended to soften my heart —for days I was kept busy ducking unripe grapefruit, wilted posies, and lurid-covered magazines of the cops-and-robbers variety, replete with gory illustrations.

The laundry as a whole watched this 20th century Heloise and Abelard saga unfold with interest. The women nuts assumed I returned his affections, the attendants viewed it wearily as one more conflagration to be curbed, and Jo was in a seventh heaven of hysterical delight at my discomfort. To be quite candid, she was not above surreptitiously egging him on, whenever she was bored!

Jo and I found the walks to and from the work the most rankling part of our routine. Getting out in the air was grand, and if we could have walked briskly, all would have been well, but of course we had to adjust our impatient gait to that of the most shambling in the forty-strong laundry lineup from Ward 6. Crossing the highway, we'd frequently meet with tourists, driving slowly, heads poked from their cars and every adenoid in full view while they stared at the "crazy people". Such incidents, of course, were excruciatingly humiliating.

Sometimes we'd fall in at the rear of the lineup, but before we'd traversed many feet, some

adjacent nut's whining would become unbearable, and one or the other of us would sing out "Pick it up" and we'd lengthen our stride in perfect accord until we were out of earshot. We would stay in our new position until another screwball's plaint drove us onward, again.

This sounds trivial to relate, but I'm trying to give a picture of a bright spring walk along a verdant path, bitterly spoiled by the restraint and the company. Four times daily, for months —it loomed large in our eyes as an irritant. It was but another example of "where every prospect pleases—and only man is vile".

Again and again, the biblical phrase recurred to me, "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh mine help . . ."

When I told Ricky this, he was baffled. "How come an agnostic like you would think of that?"

I tried to convey to him how it would relieve me when, oppressed by the sight and sound and smell of the odious dim-wits around me, I would raise my eyes and gaze afar to the conical hills of that region.

"Why would the hills help you?"

"They were comforting—" I tried to explain, haltingly, "their enduringness—"

"*Rot!*" scoffed Ricky, the iconoclast, "And *those* hills in particular aren't enduring—they're mere basaltic outcroppings."

Again let me reiterate that when I speak disparagingly of the mental patients I do not by any means include them all. So many of them were darlings. Unhappily, however, one unpleasant patient's tirades or conduct could poison a whole group by obtruding, as a decaying apple can cloy the fragrance of a barrel of

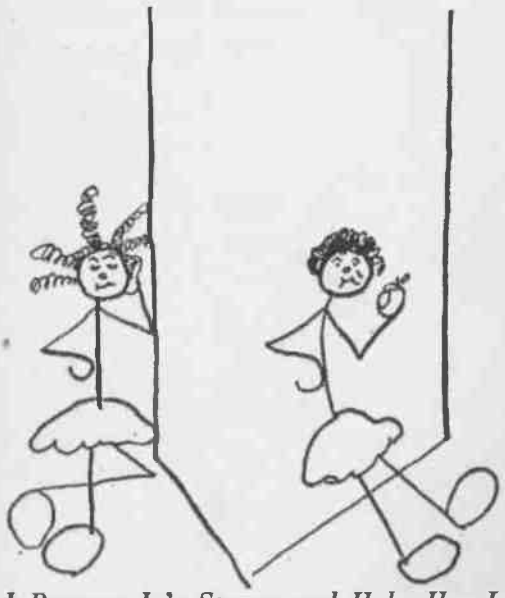
wholesome ones.

Jo paused at my board one morning and found me lavishly spraying a shirt with "Toujours Moi" perfume from a small vial I carried. The name tape showed it belonged to my hospital sweetheart, Philip. She grinned, picturing his face when he donned it.

"Just think, Jo," I mourned, "not even when I was married did I iron! With low cunning I got my husband to do it."

"How?"

"Well, I'd guilefully suggest a game of



"So I Became Jo's Stooge and Help Her Loaf"

pinochle—loser to do the ironing. The poor dope never could play pinochle."

"The compleat angler, huh? Well, cheer up, you aren't going to do any more here, either."

"She's not leaving me on the ward because I'm so inefficient!" I felt myself turn pale at the prospect.

"No, but your ironing is so darned bad, she's making you a distributor, too."

So I became Jo's stooge, and helped her loaf. When the work came from the presses in volume, we dispensed it to the hand-ironers to be finished. Also we swept, sorted, and ran innumerable errands. I became more tired on this job than at ironing, but so much of the day was idle or filled with clowning, I always felt guilty. I know to visitors it always looked as though we were there for no purpose.

Visitors there were, in plenty. The local banker and his son. A contractor brought in to estimate the cost of enlarging the laundry. State of California investigators. Unidentified people. Whoever they were—we felt the ever-present humiliation.

Jo was not the first distributor. The head distributor, who held her job solely by right of seniority, was a garrulous dame who did nothing but sit alone in a corner and carry on long spirited arguments with "Dr. Lafferty". Why she was kept on in the laundry was a mystery. Possibly the Staff felt she might snap out of this incessant talking to herself.

Now indeed did a new day dawn for me. This does not mean I became entirely reconciled to my lot. Few people enjoy being a State charge in a mental hospital. One often reads of pampered prisoners, tirades against female felons having radios in their beruffled cells. So what?

They could have grouse under glass for dinner, complete with floor show, and still have lost life's most important bequest—freedom. Nevertheless, under the comfort of Jo's companionship and the benison of a kindly boss, I bloomed. Seldom now was my pillow wet at night with the bitter salt of futile tears. Swallowing a fresh draught of courage, I faced one goal—July the eighth.

Working for a woman whose intelligence I respected, and who showed me respect in turn, altered my mood. I developed an intense interest in the hospital and its methods. Anyone I could waylay I interrogated exhaustively about hospital finances, systems and treatment procedures. (I jotted down copious reminders of all I learned. My notebook, because of its illegitimate birth, I hid in the laundry building. I was not unappreciative of the sight I presented when scribbling these cryptic notations. At any time in the laundry one could see several lady nuts writing furiously. One of these would write important messages to the president, another would send her daily love letter to Clark Gable while Verna, of course, set down her poems for posterity. To a stranger's eye, I was just one of the girls.)

Among the miscellaneous bits of hospital lore I garnered were these: that the institution had approximately thirty wards, uniformly built in the shape of an H with the arms of the H's connecting, which accounted for the numerous courtyards; that the cost of feeding patients was four and a half cents daily per patient; that attendants were paid one hundred dollars a month except for those with more specialized training

or responsibility who received more; that an alcoholic not self-committed cannot be legally held in an insane asylum beyond thirty days if he and his family unite in protest; that there is a legal distinction between an alcoholic and an inebriate, so I could still give myself airs; and most important, I was assured that State medicine was making great strides in insanity cures.

How wonderful, that last. Nowadays everyone is aware that insanity is no disgrace nor proof of tainted heritage. Everybody realizes it can strike in any home. How comforting then, to know that science is rapidly conquering madness.

But Jo and I were perplexed because no help was proffered the I-As. We'd both read articles on the treatment given alcoholics in other states and we knew psychiatry had proved helpful for drinkers elsewhere. Although I was not in Camarillo of my own volition and Jo was, still I was equally eager for help. And because my new boss sent me on an errand to the main offices, I found out why help for us was not forthcoming.

In the course of my errand, I had a long wait outside of Dr. Milland's office. Within I could hear him deep in serious conversation with a woman alcoholic. She asked him the precise question that Jo and I had pondered. The doctor must have liked and trusted the young woman, for he answered her frankly.

"Our trouble is lack of time," I heard him tell her sadly. "There is an institution in the east that is having remarkable success curing people of drinking by probing into the psyche to dis-

cover what is preying on the sufferer's subconscious mind. However, four months aren't long enough for treatment. There must be follow-up care. Here we turn the alcoholics out and do not encourage them to come back for consultation. So when they feel troubled they turn to relatives and friends for advice and these relatives are usually the last people in the world capable of giving calm, unbiased help."

"In this place back east I mentioned, there is an alcoholics' clinic, open day and night and the ex-patients are urged to return when their morale needs bolstering. The doctors there give as much time as needed to straighten out the tangles in a drinker's mind, and most drinkers are very complex. But here we have hundreds of mental patients for each doctor and we can't be bothered with the I-A's. I really wish we could try to aid them here, but we've neither the funds nor the facilities."

So now I knew. I had been gypped by this hospitalization.

Charting my losses there, I numbered:

Respect for institutions and psychiatrists,

Approximately two hundred and fifty dollars,

Girlish figure,

Last shreds of reputation.

Among gains, I numbered:

Some valued friendships not to be pursued until March of 1941 because of parole restrictions,

"A Good Backslapping Acquaintance With Every Screwball in Southern California"

A good backslapping acquaintance with every screwball in Southern California,
A good working knowledge of how to handle these same screwballs.

Ricky told me he'd be very pleased if I learned how to iron shirts while I was "on ice"—but I couldn't even manage this.

CHAPTER XI

Miss Seton would be astounded and a little hurt to know of the alacrity with which we leaped out of bed on her days off. We all loved and respected our martinet of a night nurse, but her relief nurse, a shy, doe-eyed girl, didn't know any better than to give us lights for our cigarettes before six in the morning. We were all very careful to see that she remained unenlightened.

We woud rush to the big section on these mornings at five A.M., or shortly after, to beat the ding-y women to the one hot water tap. In the tiny dripolator we'd make coffee, drink it, and then with our cigarettes accommodatingly lit, make as leisurely a toilette as was possible in the usual hurly-burly of the place.

On this day I was ecstatic—for I was to go out for seven hours with mother and Ricky. I'd been out once before for a short drive, but now we planned a longer outing, to the beach. Also, it promised to be a happier time. When Ricky had visited me first, I'd accused him, with great hostility, of telling the psychopathic office of my drinking and thus causing me to be picked up as a parole violator. He convinced me it was not he who was responsible.

"I had nothing to do with your being here now, my dear," said he, with great convincingness, "but if you take even one drink after we're married, I'll be the first one to send you back!"

Today, even the dismal Camarillo breakfast couldn't daunt me. In the crisp morning air our ward filed across the huge inner exercise courtyard. The sick bay workers ate at a different time, and since my transfer I never ate with Letty and Elise. Gloria was frequently with us, always at breakfast, since work with the hydrotherapist gave her later hours than the rest of the sick bay detail. She stood beside me now in the breakfast line.

"Don't look now," she whispered, "but that fourth roll from the left has a raisin."

I didn't answer her; I was busily "passing" the note I'd written Philip and receiving my customary one from him. The woman cafeteria worker who acted as go-between was even clumsier than I on this occasion, and we both did a lot of fumbling. In fact, we were so awkward that we were observed by a male attendant. Luckily, he was one of the "good eggs" and made no move to confiscate the notes.

"God, but you're fast!" he railed us, "Just like a couple of rattlesnakes striking! Hey, *Phil!*" he called down the line, "there's three cents postage due!"

Phil was then acting as "hot man on the woman's side". This meant, of course, that he ladled out the hot cereal to the women patients, but his "title" amused me inordinately.

When first I'd entered Camarillo, the breakfasts had some variety. On Mondays we were given scrambled eggs, Wednesdays sausage

(heavily breaded but still redolent of sausage), on Thursdays a piece of toast which we craved as a change from plain bread, and on Sunday mornings two boiled eggs.

Simultaneously with the arrival of the new matron, however, our breakfasts became unrelievedly dried fruit stewed, hot mush and milk, bread, one square of butter, one spoonful of sugar and the roasted barley drink they libelously served as coffee.

I gave up trying to eat any of the fruit but prunes. One mouthful of the other fruits was so bitter it raised as much rumpus with the ductless glands or whatever they are, as if I had the mumps. There seems to be a good deal wrong with that sentence, but there is nothing wrong with the thought behind it.

I don't say that the advent of the new matron was responsible for the restricting of the menu —it may have been coincidental.

Philip slid onto my tray some bacon and eggs he'd stolen from the attendants' dining room. Here my waitress training came in good stead. Few of the attendants were as tall as I, so when, with tray flung high, I stalked to the table, no one could peer at the tray's contents.

Without undue vanity I can admit my gang comprised the heart-breakers of the hospital. We were of dissimilar types, none of us ill-favored, and when buoyed by one another, we radiated fun and mischief—a pleasing phenomenon in this place of despair.

There were three or four lady bar-flies on Ward 7 who tried to run us competition, and while I'll admit they were very pretty girls and had swish, they didn't have our o-o-mph.

"With Tray Flung High"

So when I say our meal-time demoralized the men in the cafeteria, it is conceded I don't exaggerate.

The men from the dishwashing department, screwballs all, dropped their work and would gather in the doorway to gaze at us adoringly. One adolescent blond boy, whom we called "Peek-a-boo", would drop to his knees and peer at us over the dishwashing tubs with only his eyes and wildly dancing eyebrows visible. A dishwiper, a strange gent in an army uniform, would call cryptic messages to me — such as, "My sister sez it's *okay* for you to be Secretary of the Navy!" or, "We've taken over these floors—Hitler's next!" A middle aged man we had dubbed "Baby Hair-do" because of a monstrous golden roach, would waddle excitedly back and forth near our table.

The cooks in the far kitchen, nearly all alcoholics, would neglect their work and cluster in their doorway to see how we enjoyed the dainties they had smuggled to us. One of these men frequently assured Cottontop, "Smile and the kitchen's yours!"

The men patients eating nearest us were always the same, for their ward ate at the same time as ours. The six closest were an interesting group of men. One was startling in his resemblance to Lionel Barrymore. He never claimed he was Barrymore, however, he said he was *God*.

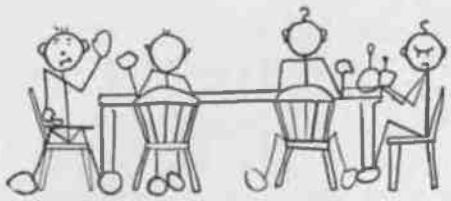
Another little loon was our pet. We called him Quivery, or more often just "Quiv". This was because of the alarming trembling that would seize him whenever he gazed upon us, which was incessantly during mealtimes. He would shudder and shake in a delirium of joy whenever we paid him the slightest attention. He would give us timid little twinkles of his fingers in the wild hope that someday we'd wave back. His face beamed at our presence in a truly ineffable fashion. He was for all the world like a fawning, ingratiating pup, I suggested to Cottontop one morning.

"Only pups dribble when they are in such an abandon of joy," said Cottontop.

"Well," interpolated Jo. "They probably have to change *him* when they get him back to his ward!"

We expected Quivery to collapse momentarily from malnutrition. He sat with his side to us and never got a mouthful of food, since that would necessitate turning his face from us long enough to hit his mouth with a spoon. Sometimes he'd attempt a bite, but whenever his eyes started to leave us he'd drop the spoon and snap back to attention—staring at us. We wanted to signal him to put his tray on his lap and face us. We waited for Quiv to realize that in that manner he need never lose a stroke.

All in all we giggled a lot in the dining room.



He Needn't Lose a Stroke"

The hours between seven and nine (visitors' time) dragged interminably. Constantly patients approached me and furtively requested a word in private. I'd know what they wanted, and although they had my sympathy, they worried me exceedingly.

They wanted me to smuggle letters to a postbox for them while I was out. This was a dangerous procedure.

The rule of allowing patients but one letter a week, written on a single sheet of paper, one side only, was strictly enforced. And that letter was always read by the doctors as an aid in charting a patient's progress. Some wards, with lenient doctors, allowed patients to write more than one letter a week, but not ours.

Nearly all sane adults away from home need to write more than one letter a week. If a patient wrote to a sweetheart or husband, her family would feel neglected and vice versa. Then there are business letters, bread and butter letters, and so on.

I wanted to accommodate these people but an attendant had told me that a patient was kept another year if caught smuggling a letter. Of

course this sounds like hooey but unreasoning panic spreads easily when one is locked in such a place.

So while refusing most of them, I felt I couldn't refuse my particular pals. I knew exactly how they felt. Soon I had twelve or thirteen letters "hidden" in my girdle. I was carrying so much first class mail I'd have had the right-of-way over a firetruck. And was I scared! I was so afraid of being frisked I was sweating like a Mississippi nigger trying to tell the truth. And no doubt I looked to be in a very interesting condition. My distended girdle would have given me immediate access to any delivery room and never did an expectant mother undergo such grueling dread.

Once safely out of the hospital and my letters mailed, I was giddy from reaction and vowed never again to go through all that.

What poignant beatitude it was to lie on the sands of a deserted beach with the asylum five blessed miles behind. What did it matter if the sea was sullen and the sky lowering? What did we care that the air was dank and that dusk would see me back in gaol? My beloved and I were together for seven untrammeled hours.

Swimming was hospital forbidden (that ol' debbil suicide-phobia), but the nippiness of the day precluded bathing anyway. With Ricky's help, my little niece built a sand castle, while mother and I talked at length about the institution. I told her of applying for a court parole which should soon be forthcoming. It was necessary to explain how court parole would be an advantage. This "privilege" permitted the bearer to pass into a courtyard any daylight hour

when not working. There the fortunate patient could smoke or exercise and dawdle in the sunshine. But even in the hospital courtyards, patients were just as imprisoned, since all of these yards had high walls and locked gates.

On the way back we stopped at a sandwich stand in a small town for refreshment. Ricky had a bottle of beer, I a cup of coffee, while mother and my niece ordered soft drinks. While there, I glanced up from the Sunday paper (a luxury!) in time to see Miss Olsen, night nurse on sick bay, pass. She lived in this little town, so adjacent to the hospital.

I called her and introduced her. She apparently was glad to see me as she put her arms around me. Had anyone suggested that she did this to make sure I'd had nothing but coffee, I'd have put the suggestion from me indignantly.

When we returned to the hospital I was driving, and I circled to the west side to show my people the sunroom on the end of our ward and other points of "interest".

Then the salt kiss of renunciation and I was ushered back into the "fold".

Trying to forget the anguish these returns always engendered, I leafed through the magazines I'd brought in. In "Life" I found an article on the American Desert. Among the illustrations was a picture of sand-dunes that looked exactly like the spot we'd just visited. I cut it out and pinned it to my weekly letter to Ricky.

Because our letter-writing was so limited, I usually wrote him in a very terse style. This was not meant to be cryptic so much as it was meant to extract every square inch of the one sheet of stationery allowed.

Ricky had told me he was bringing his mother to see mine the following week. Womanlike, I began to worry whether mother would reach home from her office in time to gather fresh living room bouquets and tidy up in general before Ricky and his mother arrived. I thought of Esther, the girl who lived next door to mother. She would gladly do it.

"On your proposed evening visit," I wrote Ricky, "be sure and notify Esther."

A few days later I was called to the patio for company. It was my father, who lived out of the State and was on one of his infrequent trips to California.

"They told me at the desk," he said, "that your 'going for a drive privilege' had been revoked. What does that mean?"

"It must be a mistake," I replied, "I've been a very good Indian."

A girl alcoholic who worked in the office and was sitting nearby spoke up.

"It has been revoked, Billie, because your boy-friend was drinking when your family took you out last. Miss Olsen came back to the hospital and reported you."

"He was *not* drinking!" I denied hotly. Then I remembered the bottle of beer. "Suppose he did have a bottle of beer? What has that to do with *me*? I didn't take a drink!"

The girl shrugged. "That's the way they do things around here."

Ricky drinks so little as to be almost a teetotaler. He probably doesn't have eight drinks a year—but he *would* choose such a time for one of his rare indulgences.

I promptly asked for an interview with my

ward doctor. I had two months to go yet, and two months with never a few hours away from the mad, two months without a decent meal, two months without the blessed cessation of nerve strain was too much. Over the grapevine, too, I'd heard my court parole had been denied and I felt the sting of injustice.

When I was called before the doctor she showed a marked coldness to me which was puzzling. In the three brief encounters I'd previously had with her, I'd been most courteous, and I felt that I'd certainly worked hard enough around the place to earn a report of "cooperativeness' and warrant at least an attentive hearing. Because I worked away from the ward, I never saw the doctor, except at request. She had talked to me altogether not more than ten or twelve minutes. There was no basis for antipathy on her part and certainly no reason for her to assume she knew me well, regardless of the "data" she may have read of my case.

My interview with the doctor was a shock; she told me my mother should not have taken me to a bar and placed temptation in my path. I said this was ridiculous; the place was obviously not a bar, or my mother would not have taken her little grandaughter in there. It was clear that she didn't believe me. I asked her why I was refused court parole. She said that my attitude was flippant, and the Staff felt I was planning to escape.

"Why, Doctor," I protested, at this ridiculous accusation, "I may be an alcoholic, but I'm not entirely stupid! If I were a fugitive from a State institution, I'd never dare apply for a marriage license, passport, or driver's license, and I'd not

dare to vote. Do you think I'd jeopardize my whole future status as a citizen to gain a few weeks' liberty?"

Dr. Tompkins insisted running away from the hospital would affect none of the ventures I outlined. Her point is not clear—maybe I wouldn't be molested applying for passports, etc.—but I'd always be afraid I would so it would amount to the same thing.

"What about the letters you write to this man?" she asked, with acerbity, "Mentioning his 'proposed evening visit', and telling him to 'notify someone' certainly sounds as though you planned to run away."

I looked at her helplessly. How could I explain to this bigoted woman that the message was merely intended to ask a neighbor to help make mother's home spic and span for an important event?

"Furthermore," she added, "does it look nice to send him a picture of a snake? We are sure you are writing in code!"

"A *snake!*"

She really had me there.

Suddenly I remembered. The sand dune picture I'd sent Ricky to recall our happy outing, had on the back of it a picture of a desert rattler. With typical institutional distrust, the doctor had unpinned the picture and reversed it!

"I don't write him in code," I laughed. I'm ashamed of the disconnectedness of my correspondence from here, because I've always prided myself on the clarity of my letters. But Doctor, with so much to say and only one page to say it on, one has to omit even paragraph indentations, still *he* always knows what I mean."

She admitted then that she had not allowed my letters to Ricky to be mailed; in fact, without notifying me, she'd been holding them for some time past. No wonder Ricky had written me so indignantly.

"Well, Wilma," she concluded, "I'll have to talk with your people before your privileges will be restored. You have a poor attitude and you seem to think Camarillo is a lark."

All faith I'd had in her as a psychiatrist and a physician died in that moment. That one woman could so little know the heart of another was incredible. Because theretofore, in her brief glimpses of me, she'd seen me putting a brave face on my trouble, because I'd laughed with the patients and been cheerful in my association with the attendants, she still couldn't sense the heavy heart I carried, or guess that I frequently cried myself to sleep, why then she was insensate indeed. My charts showed that, save for a periodic weakness for alcohol, I was normal in all respects—and if a person is normal, obviously they can't like being confined. It was another case of "'Physician, heal thyself".

The interview over, I hid in the clothes room and cried until I was weak and ill. Two or three times Mrs. Read slipped in to try to comfort me.

"For heaven's sake, Wilma," she threatened finally, "if you don't stop crying I'll have it written on your chart that you are 'disturbed'. The hospital frowns upon giving away to tears like this."

"When you are right you are wrong around here," I sobbed. "First I'm reproached because the doctor thinks I consider Camarillo's a lark, and now you're telling me I'll get in trouble because I **don't** think it's a lark!"

CHAPTER XII

It was Friday—show night. Once a week we were unlocked through the wards to the dining hall, which was transformed into a theatre. On our way, it was necessary to pass through Ward 4. We hated this. The bad wards always smelled like an abattoir and we dreaded the sight of rows of bound and manacled women struggling on their beds. The reek of paraldehyde almost felled us. Paraldehyde was the hospital's equivalent of a "Mickey Finn" and prodigally used. The day hall pillars with their huge gashes gave mute evidence of epic battles. This trek always put us in a discontented mood for the show. But if we didn't go to the show or failed to attend any of the other "activities" we were marked down on our charts as "anti-social". The alcoholics, one and all, maintained that these shows must be the Cure. They were agony to sit through.

Even though I am a Hollywood habitue, I would never have guessed such horse-operas were still being filmed.

"That," groaned Philip at the conclusion of one of these Westerns, "is the picture to end all pictures!" He said it loud enough for us to hear,

even though the sheep-and-goats seating arrangement was carried out in the "theatre" at Camarillo, too. The men had the right half of the hall and it was torture for us to sit through a rotten show and smell the smoke from the cigarettes they were free to light—and we weren't.

Besides wanting to have our chart read "normal social tendencies", we went to the show to flirt. Probably the men and women alcoholics that became interested in one another there would never look at each other outside an institution, but we'd get so bored with the monotony there was very little we wouldn't do to relieve tedium.

"Two more men like that hero and we could lick the world!" muttered another drunk.

"I thought sure for awhile they were going to have to stop the picture to wipe the blood from the screen!" commented a third.

As the hero had taken the heroine in his brawny arms, Jo and I had flung ourselves in each other's arms and had smooched noisily. The lights going up just then we received a menacing look from the head matron who didn't appreciate our clowning. We sidled from the hall like paddled brats.

The conversations in our dormitory after the attendants had left us were invariably amusing. Where thirty women are gathered, scandal and spicy small talk is inevitable. There were lots of remarks I'd like to repeat but dare not.

Letty was cold creaming her face.

"I'm so hungry," she complained, "that if I had some crackers I'd smear this avocado cream on them and eat it."

Elise was telling of her day out with her hus-

band, the first time she'd been alone with him for two months.

"We went fishing", she explained.

This remarkable statement was met with loud hoots of derision.

"How do you spell it?"

"No wonder you are contemplating a divorce!"

"Why, the dirty dog!"

Letty, reading her mail, suddenly shrieked with laughter.

"Listen to this!" she implored us. "This is a letter from Ann, a chum of mine. She wants to know if she can come up and spend the night with me!"

We all laughed. One of our nightly diversions was reading aloud such excerpts from the mail. Friends and relatives continually offered to send us bedlamps and radios. Ricky had wanted to send me a typewriter. My first ten letters from him contained none too subtle implications that I'd been lying about being allowed to write but one letter a week. This was because the head matron of the place had been so ignorant of our ward rules or so mendacious as to tell my family I could write all I wanted if I had my own stamps and stationery. What was my word, implied Ricky, against such an authoritative dictum?

Being a drinker shouldn't destroy one's veracity or reputation for veracity if it is inherent. Heretofore, even while drinking, my family had always regarded me as candid. I'd never been the type of drinker to maintain owlishly I'd had but one drink. In fact, I leaned backward to announce I was blotto when I wasn't — quite. Therefore, Ricky's persistent doubt of my word

about the mail situation afforded me insult—and the girls amusement. The letter I was reading now said, ". . . the afternoon mail has come and no letter from you. Give them hell up there and get your letters out. Could you telephone me?"

This last crack all but gave us hysterics. A letter from my aunt advised me to "keep busy".

Jo, per usual, could top us all. Her family could never get it out of their heads that she was reclining in an invalids' bower, anxiously consulted over by specialists, with throngs of day and night nurses hovering tenderly about her, administering to her wants. Almost daily she received one of those ready-made "Illness" greeting cards from her family. Tonight's dilly read as follows:

"Every morning while you're ill may the
sun shine through,
Every day may kindly thoughts cheer and
comfort you,
Every evening may you go to sleep most
happily,
Because you're one day closer to complete
recovery!"

"Shucks," I groaned, "I don't like this idea of Judge Munsey's. I think I'll write him a letter and say, 'Dear Judge, I'd like to try instead your other system—companionate marriage!' "

"Good heavens," said Cottontop, becoming aware for the first time of the small metal plate in the wall above her bed, "Do you suppose that thing could be a dictograph? We all talk so frankly in here we are sunk if it is!"

"It's supposed to be a thermostat," I told her,

but it certainly doesn't look like one." Like the two old women in the fairy tale, we started helping each other worry—guilty consciences, of course.

Alma was looking after a girl I-A we called "Junior". She had been sick all day. From time to time one or another of us would become ill from no apparent cause. We'd be all right, but would suddenly be laid low with nausea and a slight fever. It may have been caused by the monotonously heavy starch diet or it may have been the constant mental strain. We only knew it was **not** a hangover or morning sickness.

We all discussed a rumour around the ward that our belongings' boxes were to be searched.

"What a place!" sighed Gloria, "Where the doctors prescribe a shakedown instead of a rub-down!"

The chief topic of conversation, however, was the impending dance. Long rumoured, it was now definitely scheduled for the coming Tuesday. The men to whom we had promised dances were discussed with an unconstrained knowingness that would have whitened their hair had they heard us. If a man interested us, we promptly went to work: Cottontop from her position of vantage in the office would report his financial and marital status, Margo his I.Q. and physical; Betty would ascertain the results of his dental exam and Wassermann; and I, at the laundry, would complete his dossier by determining the quality of his underwear and how often he changed.

Cottontop was told that a man she professed to admire was suffering from Luetic encephalitis, or words to that effect.

"What does it mean?" asked Cottontop, awed.

When we explained it was a form of syphilis of the brain, she was very downcast for a second, then said brightly:

"Oh, well, it doesn't show!"

"If you're still hungry. Letty, come over here!" called Alma from across the dormitory.

When the boys had made an extra lavish raid for us or when we first received our store orders, we often pooled resources and had a boarding-schoolish spread in bed. On this night we had ordered canned shrimps, pickles, potato chips and mayonnaise, and this augmented by bread filched from the dining room, made very exotic fare for our bean-jaded appetites.

We were allowed to spend a dollar and a half a week from the hospital, ordering on Sunday, receiving our goods on Wednesday. A truck driver from the institution ran these errands, and he made every effort to bring us the things requested, in reason, although I doubt if he'd have bought a pint of Old Taylor upon petition. Unlike the situation at Lincoln Heights, however, I don't think the agent made a penny from these transactions. The price of sugar, coffee, and cosmetics seemed strictly Kosher.

Tonight, we regretted that the single small section within the locked dormitory didn't have a hot water tap so that we might make coffee. We perforce kept our coffee-making paraphernalia with us at all times. Suddenly Cottontop remembered her freshly filled hot water bottle in her bed and we immediately *did* have coffee.

At this inauspicious moment the door gratingly unlocked and Mrs. Salsbury entered with a new customer for our dormitory. Although she

was not unkind, we gathered from her attitude that using a bed for a kitchen and banquet board was not exactly cricket in the institution. Therefore we cleared everything away, managing to swallow everything edible in so doing. Then we gave our undivided attention to our new dormitory fellow.

Something told us our new playmate was not exactly an asset to the dormitory. She was a big bruiser, and she appeared completely batty. She went about the business of retiring in a trance-like state.

We all exchanged meaningful glances between reproachful stares at Mrs. Salsbury, who carefully avoided looking at any of us. We felt justified in our resentment, as our dormitory had the reputation of being the "best dormitory" in the "best ward". We prided ourselves on the fact that we seldom gave trouble; our group contained the hardest-working, best-humored alcoholics and the most rational mental patients.

The attendant withdrew, turning out the lights. All was quiet for a few minutes; we weren't now in the mood for the usual badinage. Our apprehensions were shortly justified. The new patient rose from her bed and began a somnambulistic tour of the long room. There being no moon, we felt her movements rather than saw them; now and again we could detect a blacker hulk in the blackness surrounding our beds. Someone advised us in a whisper that this woman's delusion was that G-men were after her, and probably she was looking under the beds for them.

"I'd like to find a G-man under mine!" averred Letty.

Apparently the woman had no intentions of confining her search to beneath beds because presently we heard an irate bellow from a far corner.

"Get out of my bed!" snapped a patient. Silence again save for the occasional footfall we dreaded. Then we heard Elise tremulously inquiring,

"Haven't you got the wrong beds?"

Jo quavered fearfully, "Come get in bed with me, Billie."

"No," I answered, "I'm putting cold cream all over me so I'll be harder to hang onto, if I'm next."

It was noted with amusement that when we "had to go", we went to the small section in pairs. A tone of nervous hilarity crept into the few remarks exchanged.

"Call the attendant," someone growled at last, "I work hard and need sleep and darned if I can sleep with that truckhorse prowling around. She belongs in the 'disturbed dormitory'."

"It won't do any good to ask the attendant to change her," complained another. "Mrs. Evan is relieving Mrs. Salsbury now and it would tickle Evan to annoy us."

"Well, I bet when Seton comes on at eleven we'll get some action. Miss Seton doesn't fool around with these new patients. If she even suspects they are pests, they stay right up by her in the disturbed room."

I began to feel ashamed. Despite this new patient's blank actions, she might be understanding and resenting our every remark. Notwithstanding, we agitated until she was changed

to another dormitory. As Jo said, "Never a dull moment." We had learned horripilation was not a myth of the blood-and-thunder authors.

To cap the evening's irregularities, around midnight the head matron, Mrs. Melody, called a mental patient from our dormitory to a long, whispered conference in the hall. This virtually convinced us that the mental patient was a stool pigeon, and it was an anticlimax to learn the matron had merely wanted the patient to read the nurse's fortune by playing cards.

This seems an effective sidelight on the grey matter of our keepers.

The next day was such a glorious gift of spring as to make confinement trebly irksome. Jo and I stared entranced at the sky. Clouds were scattered like organdie boudoir pillows on a cerulean spread. One cunning cloud resembled a guppy. This somehow made me think of the question Dr. Milland had asked me concerning the cost of fish. "If a fish and a half cost a cent and a half, how much would seven fish cost?" The answer came to me suddenly. Just then Dr. Milland passed.

"I got it!" I yelled.

"Got what?" he gasped, startled.

"*Seven cents,*" I returned, triumphantly. Dr. Milland went on his way, shaking his head bewilderedly.

It was bed-airing day, when we received fresh linens and made our beds at sundown. Because Jo and I finished work at four, we generally made the beds of our friends on sick bay, who worked until seven. At such times, when we'd be alone in the clean, quite dormitory with the late sun splashing leaf patterns on the floor and

the burgeoning trees murmuring outside, the hospital seemed most pleasant. Jo and I would take opposite sides of the room and race one another at bedmaking. None of the pixillated would be about to annoy us; the work was more like our duties in our own almost forgotten homes; thus we'd give full play to our exuberance in loud, and what we fondly felt was close, harmony. We liked to harmonize hymns, but I remembered only three of these. We were pretty good on torch songs, too, especially such little ditties as, "Let him remember me as I used to be". We could really throw our hearts into that one. Jo would be "Bing" and handle the boop-ety-boops while I came in strong on the o-ompahs. On one of these occasions some attendants from Ward 5 rushed in to see who was disturbed on the "good" Ward 6!

The mail came, bringing me letters and some books from Ricky. Since I'd told him the doctor thought I was writing him in code, he'd taken unholy joy in deluging me with letters and postcards signed "Operator X 9", covered with symbols and hieroglyphics that meant nothing to him, much less to me, but which, until I caught on, gave me many bad moments trying to decipher them.

Among the books he sent was the Communist Manifesto. This distinctly was taking advantage of a person already on the spot. Wandering around a State institution with the Manifesto is like peddling the Talmud-Torah on the main drag in Berlin.

Ricky was taking a course in political science and perforce had to study all forms of government—hence the cerise literature.

Not wishing to destroy the Manifesto, as he'd asked me to make some marginal notations for him, I was hard put to conceal this incendiary matter from the gimlet eyes of certain attendants. At times it would rest beneath my mattress, but when I suspected a routine ward inspection, I'd hide it in my pants, which made me walk like Donald Duck.

Dear Ricky! Another book he sent me was entitled "Clinical Psychiatry". I didn't have this long; the doctor heard about it and ordered it confiscated. But I managed to read it before it was taken away from me. It contained two chapters on alcoholism, the pertinent passages heavily underscored by Ricky. The gist of it comforted me as, for instance: "Dipsomania presents, on the whole, a more favorable prospect of overcoming the alcoholism than ordinary drunkenness," because, as the book explained, there was less "alcoholic deterioration".

The doctor's action in taking this book was understandable. While I might understand portions of it and find it helpful, it was scarcely the thing to leave around where impressionable mental patients might get hold of it. It is human nature to study patent medicine advertisements and immediately feel yourself developing the botts or whatever malady the ad is ballyhooing.

Interest in ailments was, naturally, intense around the hospital. If anyone was unguarded enough publicly to admit a symptom, a kangaroo court was immediately held, based on a surprising degree of misinformation. We were told that using hot water caused "information" of the muscles, and that dizziness was a sign of "elliptical" fits!

That night at dinner we all had a bad moment. The kitchen alcoholics had taken to slipping onto our chairs, food, which we could, with clever legerdermain, transfer to our laps as we sat down. The men had started this system, because for some time the goofs in our line watched our trays jealously as we filed past the food, and we all felt the new way of smuggling food to us was much safer. Some of the more envious screwballs were still suspicious, however, and kept us under observation even while we ate. We couldn't blame the poor things. Privileges were so rare in the hospital that an extra spoonful of beans became a topic of contention. Some patients were even jealous of the food bought on store orders; but that, too, was comprehensible. It can't be much fun to be a mental patient confined for years, possibly for life, in an asylum, with your people either gone or too poor or indifferent to send spending money, and to watch other patients, especially the hated transient alcoholics, have delicacies.

It is entirely possible to be frequently hungry in an institution. Trays that went to sick bay were almost uniformly untouched, but the workers who ate in the cafeteria generally had stout appetites. Patients could have all the bread wanted unless the attendant in charge of passing it was in a nasty temper, but often the patients craved, and craved sharply, more of the main dish. It was never forthcoming.

For days on end we had been having beans, carrots, and bread—beans, beets, and bread—beans, turnips, and bread, etc., ad nauseum. Once I stared at my tray and asked the girls if they realized that we had ten items of food.

They counted. There was a spoonful of cottage cheese, an onion, some lettuce, beans, potatoes, hash, bread and butter, soup, peanut butter, milk, and a cookie. Gloria told me to look over by the men's side and I'd see the reason for the unusual largesse. Sure enough, there was Doctor Barrett on a tour of inspection. Thus we learned that the doctors meant for the patients to have enough to eat. But they did not get around often enough to see their wishes enforced.

It was rumored that the reason a popular doctor had resigned the preceding year was because he had no will to remain associated with an institution where the patients, to use his words, were given "poor food and not enough of it". It was claimed, furthermore, that this doctor had afterwards stated publicly that there were "maggots in the macaroni and larvae in the cauliflower".

On that score I've nothing to say. I seldom found any animal matter, legitimate or otherwise, in the food. However, the Camarillo cuisine is scarcely to be recommended for its quality or quantity.

This night the boys had left eight pork chops on my chair. I scooped them into my lap while Jo narrowly missed sitting on a pie. We were elated. (I mean delighted! "Elated" means more unfortunate connotation in medical parlance.) at all this until a nut at the next table saw our windfall and called for Mrs. Manley. The attendants had been receiving so many complaints about us that she bore down on us now with blood in her eye, determined to settle the fuss once and for all. Jo slammed the pie into her knitting bag under the table, while I, with my

"Jo Narrowly Missed Sitting On a Pie"

back to Mrs. Manley, slid the greasy chops into the bosom of my dress.

"Girls," she sighed, "they tell me again you have more food than the rest. How about it?"

Round-eyed, we held up various store orders we always lugged in with us for red-herring purposes—the usual pickles, catsup, and mayonnaise. Mrs. Manley turned to the next table, completely out of patience.

"You know very well," she told the belligerent crackbrains, "that all patients are allowed to buy food through store orders. Now don't let me hear any more about this!" And she stalked away, leaving the befuddled dim-wits to go into a slow burn. They knew well something had boomeranged, but couldn't clarify the situation to their liking.

Mrs. Manley came back to our table from the kitchen.

"I have some bad news for you, girls," she said, "but I won't spoil your dinner. I'll tell you when we are back on the ward."

Our consciences smarting, we instantly assumed retribution was upon us and that we'd probably be separated at meal times henceforth, an edict we'd been expecting and dreading. Consequently, relief flooded us when we found the news referred to a routine inspection. But what an inspection!

"I'll need your help, girls," explained Mrs. Manley. "I have to look at every patient on the ward with a magnifying glass and you know some of them will put up a fight, so if I can count on you to hold them for me, I'd appreciate it."

"What about Hazel?" someone asked wtih understandable nervousness. Hazel was the most combative patient on our ward, a pathetic creature who lived entirely in a shadow world. She never talked with anyone real or seemed aware of actual occurrences about her, but went about her work intelligently enough, save that she was continually hurling vituperative tirades at the imaginary hussies who had broken up her home; hussies who, to her disordered mind, were always advancing on her. "Get away!" she'd scream, kicking viciously at an imaginary woman. And heaven help the innocent bystander who was within reach of Hazel's flying feet, with their truly remarkable radius.

"Well," said Mrs. Manley, reflectively, "maybe we'd better skip Hazel. After all, if she has 'em, it's a cinch no one will get 'em!"

When this unpleasant chore was completed, we were enraged to learn that the Staff had ordered all of us to shampoo in kerosene, notwithstanding that every woman on our ward was found to be as clean as the proverbial whistle.

We wailed that the dance was on the morrow, that we didn't want to smell of coal oil; but poor Mrs. Manley had to carry out her orders.

"There'll be onions for dinner tomorrow, too," promised Gloria, from long asylum experience. She was right. Boy, were we lilies!

Shortly before bedtime a very young alcoholic who worked in the office announced that she'd heard there was to be a Glee Club organized and she suggested I join. I'm certainly no vocalist, but I would have signed up for a spell of Epworth junketing to lighten the monotony.

We all felt very sorry for this kid, by the way. She was only twenty-two years old and could not have been very deep in her cups; but possibly her family had considered Camarillo as a preventive measure. I wondered if I, at her age, could have taken all this. The years had brought me a measure of philosophic calm and resignation to injustices, but in my teens and early twenties I felt such poignant sympathy for the ill or oppressed of this world that the experience of living with the mindless and the deformed would have left an indelible scar. As it was, I felt an autopsy might show "Camarillo" engraved where they found "Calais" on Mary, Queen of Scots.

I had craftily prevailed upon this child to look up my chart and "continuous notes" while she was at work, and now she had the results for me.

"They say you are flippant."

"Well, that's true," I had to concede.

"And you are planning to escape."

This was so silly that I merely smiled.

"And you boasted you would get your court parole through 'pull'."

"They must have made up that one out of whole cloth," I chuckled. "I certainly have no 'pull' around here, and I wouldn't have mentioned it if I had. I haven't even made any joking remarks they could have misconstrued — that is, I've made no cracks such as 'I'd get my court parole by fluttering my eyelashes at the head man', or anything like that. I can't understand that item at all."

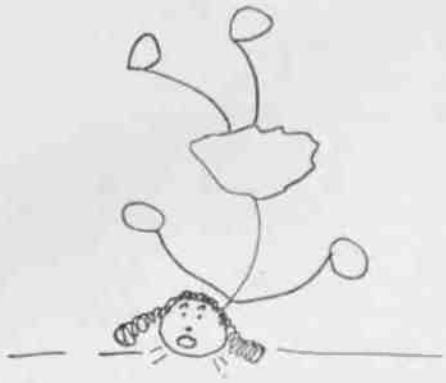
"And they say you write your boy friend in code——"

"At last I've remembered how that idea arose. In my first letter home I told my family I didn't get enough to eat, and that the joint was worse than Lincoln Heights. I did this by ambiguous statements. I said I was eating as much as I did at the A——, a hotel where the chef always outwitted me by having nothing ready until it was time for me to go on duty and where we weren't allowed to eat after work. Secondly, I told Ricky that 'last July was an idyll'. I knew the censors would assume I referred to my love life, but Ricky knows I spent most of July in jail.

"I told the girls around here of my expedient and one of them stool pigeoned."

"And your report says that for the average run of alcoholic patients, you are remarkably intellectual—what are you laughing at?"

"Whoops!" I yelled. "I took three months to solve a simple problem in arithmetic, and the doctor calls me intellectual!"



"Made a Two-point Incisor Landing"

CHAPTER XIII

Having made a two-point incisor landing (forced) in a bathtub some years previously, my two front teeth were glisteningly phony. They were also glisteningly expensive and responsible for occasional weird table manners on my part. as I would give apples a lateral tackle, and chicken-legs a surprise technique.

Soon after being committed, the C. S. H. dentist had given my teeth a cursory examination, and I mean cursory. The dentist was not required to give alcoholic patients dental care, but just had to see how many teeth they had, as evidence, in case any were knocked out later in some of the place's "free-for-alls", or for identification in case of escape.

Something went wrong with my lovely fakes and a great deal of pain developed behind them.

Hot and cold liquids hurt the now tender incisor area, as did air inhaled when talking. When you have a woman who can't talk in comfort, you have a frenzied female. So I requested an interview with the dentist, which was grudgingly granted. The charge attendant reminded me, however, that I could expect no actual dental work.

The dentist was pleasant enough, and explained the trouble to me in highly technical language—something about the gum receding from the base of the false teeth, leaving a painfully vulnerable surface.

"You have a very real problem," he admitted, "I'm sorry I can't help you. If the pain persists, I'll paint your teeth with nitrate of silver, which will relieve the soreness. But let's hope it won't be necessary as that would turn your teeth black for weeks."

All I could do, therefore, was keep my tongue tightly pressed over the sore place while eating or drinking or when a cold wind blew.

The hospital chose this time to inaugurate a unique little dental hygiene campaign. After each meal and before we were permitted to smoke, the entire ward must line up and brush teeth under inspection.

From years of custom, I brush my teeth morning and evening, so this new system meant that my gums were attacked five times daily. I'm not suggesting that brushing teeth five times daily might not be beneficial, I'm asserting merely that it was darned painful. And our aesthetic senses suffered. Those lineups! Even without the sick bay workers, there were about seventy of us, and only about fourteen could be

accomodated at the tub and fountains. Try brushing your teeth jostled by seventy-odd maniacs gargling, hawking, spitting, spraying, spewing, flourishing bridgework and unsavory upper-plates under your flinching nostrils! The fountains resembled African watering holes at sundown, at these times.

Nor was that all: our brushes were hung from hooks in gaudy little rows upon a "toothbrush board". Jo was in charge of this. One day Cottontop, who was an incipient hypochondriac, grumbled that she didn't like other people's toothbrushes drooling pyorrhea down on her brush. I joined in the complaint.

"Oh, hell," said Jo, "I'll put your two brushes on the top row where no one can dribble on them."

We consented dubiously.

"O. K."

Jo then took the board outside for its daily sunning. Just as she returned we heard a clatter and looked through the door which the attendant had unlocked for such errands. The toothbrush board had taken a nosedive into the dust of the courtyard.

Thereafter, Cottontop and I carried our own toothbrushes around with us.

The toilet paper situation on the ward was grave, too. The issue of tissue was really a matter of moment. The paper was not left in its accustomed place as in homes, because it's surprising how lunatics react to toilet paper. They write on it. They festoon themselves with it. They eat it. They play games with it. But we, the sane patients, were little better. We used it for kleenex, for hankies, for table nap-

kins, for hair curling, and so on, ad infinitum. Therefore, the paper was rationed out. Each of us received a bundle of it on Monday nights, and that was supposed to last the week. I had to overcome my embarrassment when, as it frequently did, mine dropped from my pocket at work and some man would gallantly retrieve it.

Other things issued by the asylum were big sunhats and really handsome white raincoats for the laundry workers to wear during rainy weather. To save myself from freckling. I tried the sunhats. I wore my hair down to make the hat fit, but felt so silly walking along with my hair hanging in the breeze that I chose the freckles as the lesser evil.

One day Jo came hunting me to tell me that a good-natured attendant was going to let us out in a courtyard for an hour. This was a great pleasure. The wards were well ventilated and ours had no overpowering odors as some of the low-grade wards did. Still, there was a marked difference in the air whenever we were allowed to step outside.

On this occasion, while strolling outside arm-in-arm with Jo, we discovered, with a nostalgic longing for freedom, that spring had brought its ever-impressive changes. The barren courtyards were no longer desolate and bleak. The few trees were heavy with foliage. Here and there were brave little plots set aside for gardening by the patients under the kindly tutelage of the occupational therapist. We, too, felt the annual rebirth. It was good to be alive, and by contrast, doubly disagreeable to be imprisoned.

Gloria was sitting on a bench, chuckling over a newspaper item she was reading, something

about the royal family in England serving tea in the orangery, to the consternation of the royal servants, since the "orangery" (whatever that might be) was half a mile from the royal kitchen.

"H-h-here," gasped Gloria, imitating a breathless footman, "is your te-hea, Your Highness!"

Gloria was feeling especially gay that day. Her boss, the hydrotherapist, had resigned in disgust at some of the hospital's procedure, so Gloria had applied for a working parole and expected to leave the hospital to go out on a job. Most patients dreaded job paroles where they work for an indetern.inate period of parole at an arduous job, generally in a sanitarium, for very small pay, usually fifteen or twenty dollars a month and board. But it was one way to get out of the institution, so Gloria had applied. She knew she had some hard work facing her, but she argued that it couldn't be much harder than she had performed in her daily scouring of the Hydro chamber.

A ding-y young woman who forevermore insisted she was pregnant came up to pester us with a detailed account of her "symptoms". She told us if we'd place our hands on her stomach, we'd feel "life".

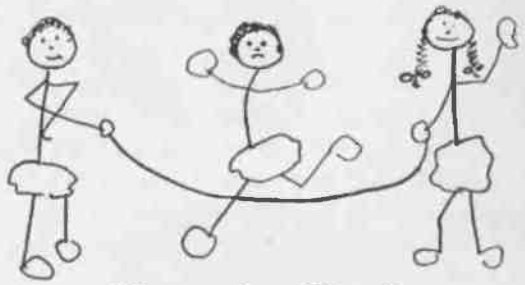
"Oh, scram, will you!" Gloria told her.

"Now, Gloria," I interposed, mildly, "let the poor child have her happiness."

"She can have her happiness!" Gloria grumbled, adding plaintively, "but do we have to *feel* her happiness?"

Just then we saw a little sixteen-year-old patient from another ward jumping rope. On a sudden impulse Jo and I joined her.

"This should reduce some of that bean-weight." said Jo. Whether this juvenile jouncing aided girth-control or no, for an hour we had fun indulging in sports we'd almost forgotten. We vied with one another seeing who could remember the most childhood chants. Jo contributed, "Lady, lady turn around — Lady, lady, touch the ground," a masterpiece that wound up with "twenty-three skidoo"; while I recalled, "Mother, mother, I am sick—call the doctor, quick, quick, quick. Doctor, doctor, shall I die? Yes, my child, but do not cry--"



"Twenty-three Skidoo"

Simultaneously we remembered the time-honored "Salt, pepper, vinegar, mustard" killer-diller we used to jump with the greatest of ease. While I doubt if Jo and I have hardening of the arteries yet, that finished us for that afternoon, although we vowed to repeat the experiment and stay sylphlike.

Because we were by now in a thoroughly childish mood, we played that completely infantile game of "steps". To the best of my knowledge the last time I had played it was the day before the Armistice. Too late we realized that

any number of doctors might have glanced out of the window. God knows what mental disorder they'd credit us with had they seen us! Already that ubiquitous pair, Dr. Lafferty and Mrs. Jolsen, head guy and matron respectively, had found me in some embarrassing acts. They had found me eating weeds once, not knowing Jo and I had just remembered how we enjoyed a certain tiny seed in our grammar school days and we'd discovered the same weed growing around Camarillo. Again they had caught me skating down a slanting corridor in true Hans Brinker fashion, because my Japanese slippers slid so beautifully. I think I was suspect around the institution.

"Yes," I observed to Jo, "all this childishness should be very good exercise. Ricky told me last summer I'd have to find a new man if I gained four ounces."

"Last summer!" exclaimed Jo, casting a critical gaze at my bean belt. "What is he, myopic?"

"Look at my freckles!" I said, ignoring her unkind thrust, "I've gotten all these just walking to and from the laundry. Just think, if I hadn't asked for a transfer and had stayed my four months on the sick bay job, working thirteen hours a day, seven days a week, I'd have gotten no sunshine and air at all this spring except for the few times I've had company. I guess the doctor doesn't think of things like that when she refuses patients court parole. And she refused it to me in a flimsy pretext—that I might escape! If I were going to escape, I wouldn't start from that big inner courtyard that is in the heart of the hospital. There are too many walls to scale!"

Jo had received her court parole, but refused to use it out of sympathy for me. It was really sweet of her to stick by me, as the other girls had fun out there, watching the ball games, flirting with the I-A's, and being free of the bad screwballs for a few hours. The only times Jo and I saw the inner courtyard was when we crossed it at mealtimes. The small courtyard in which we jumped rope had more than its quota of disgusting sights, but we kept our eyes carefully averted from these.

At long last, the dance. It was not my first bughouse ball, but it was the first for Jo. She protested against going and I knew how she felt. I had not been enthusiastic about attending festivities in such a place either, but the dances had turned out to be a barrel of fun. I pleaded with her to go, but she kept demurring, on the ground that she didn't like the idea of dancing with anyone but her husband and one is not supposed to clutter up the dining room on these nights unless one dances. At last she agreed and we prinked elaborately.

In books I had read by crazy people who have become sane long enough to write a book, or by sane persons gone crazy long enough to write a book, the dances are described very differently from those held in the dining room at Camarillo. Other books about such places had led me to believe the male attendants and doctors danced with the women patients, and women attendants danced with the men patients. I was glad of this because I had my eyes on one of the two handsome male attendants. Yes, the quota was that low. Generally one had to look hastily at a man attendant's white shoes to make sure he

wasn't a patient. A ding-y patient.

But in C. S. H. the deranged guests danced with one another and with the drunks. It wasn't so bad. The men didn't look any more dissipated or screwy than they do in most dance-halls. I danced mostly, of course, with the alcoholics. Among the mental patients I kept expecting to hear someone proclaim himself Napoleon, but I didn't. In all of Camarillo I encountered but two such patients. One woman said she was Mrs. Adolph Hitler and a man said he was the long-lost Charley Ross. And, as far as I'm concerned, they may have been just who they said they were. One girl was forever mentioning Warner Baxter. But she didn't think she was Warner Baxter. She thought something far different. I wish I dared tell what she thought. I wish I could. I really wish I could!

One man I danced with must have been a split personality, because he led me in a rhumba with one foot while we were trucking with the other.

The social etiquette at the dances was very formal. We had to sit in a prim lineup across from the men, and there was no social intercourse among the women from the various parts of the hospital regardless of how well acquainted they were. You had to sit with the ward "that brung you". It was a joy to watch the start of each dance. The men seemed to figure as long as they were already in the nuthouse they might as well fling their inhibitions to the winds. They would poise on their toes across the hall from the demure women, and would champ at the bit until the first note of music sounded, when they'd advance overwhelmingly on us in an engulfing wave. We'd almost drown in the pha-

lanxes of men surging over us.

Most of my dances were reserved, of course, for Philip. It seemed strange to know him so well, when we'd talked together so seldom. Once when he was away from the hospital, he'd visited my mother, and they had become quite well acquainted. Tonight he had news for me. He was a British subject and on the Royal Air Force Reserve list. In view of the impending war he could leave the hospital if he would only sign papers agreeing to return to England. It saddened me to think of his going, especially to such probable chaos. But after Camarillo, he proclaimed, he was thoroughly conditioned to anything.

On the way home from the dance I related to Jo what I'd read in accounts written by patients of similar institutions. When she heard of one place in which the patients knew which fork to use and asked politely for the olives to be passed she was incredulous.

"But we only get forks for our Sunday lunch, just a big spoon for the other meals. And as for olives, say, the guy who wrote that must have been so drunk he just thought he was in a bughouse—sounds to me like he was in the Biltmore by the Sea. And you tell me the movies in other mental hospitals are carefully selected? I think we'd better apply for a transfer; all we get is two-gun Westerns."

"Once in awhile we get a movie that isn't a blood and thunder horse opera," I reminded her, "but when they aren't Westerns they are blood-curdling mystery thrillers or gangster sagas. I believe they're selected with an eye to getting our poor nuts disturbed."

As we climbed into bed Letty turned and confided solemnly that this was the first dance she'd ever attended that she hadn't been propositioned.

Elise created a disturbance just then. She'd just discovered what I'd done to her bed. Ever since she'd told us of the day she'd spent with her husband fishing, she'd been subjected to a great deal of uncouth razzing. As she'd left for the dance ahead of me, I'd seized the opportunity to rig a fishpole over her bed. It was made of a mop-stick, some string, a bent pin, and a sardine attached, the sardine carefully wrapped in cellophane. The attendant came to turn out the lights and Elise hid the sardine, vowing vengeance.

"I'm getting awfully fed up with sick bay," grumbled Letty. "I think I'll ask for a transfer, or go over the hill. We've had three deaths on sick bay so far this week, and that crazy Binnie follows poor old Hannah around telling her she caused the deaths, and now Hannah believes she is responsible, and she won't eat or sleep and the whole place is going to pot."

"Why don't you ask to be transferred to the laundry?" Jo asked Letty.

"Well, I don't think they transfer you where you request. The old hands around here told me to state the job I wanted when I attended Incoming Staff, so when the doctors asked me what kind of work I did best, I told them I was a house-to- house canvasser, but I'm still here!"

A chorus of groans at her witticism made Letty turn over to sleep. She had to make one final sally. "Gosh," she mourned, "it's terrible

to have say goodnight to thirty women instead of one man!"

Farther down in the dormitory a conversation centered on boats. Alma and her husband had lived for six years aboard their boat, putting in mostly at Hilo, and she regretted being unable to sleep beneath the stars now. Cottontop's former husband had had a yacht, too, so the two girls exchanged boat measurements and anecdotes. An unidentified voice chimed:

"Aw, my husband has the biggest boat."

"What kind?" inquired Alma, politely.

"The U. S. S. Mississippi!"

Jo asked me if I'd miss Philip when he left. Before I could assure her I would, Elise told her I'd really grieve from hunger.

"The way to a woman's heart around here is but definitely through her digestive tract!"

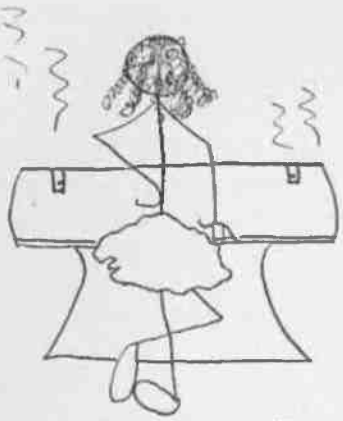
Cottontop asked me if I still liked the laundry. I waxed enthusiastic about my work there as a distributor.

"Jo and I sing, play solitaire, eat and loaf. It's swell!" I didn't mention any of the tasks we performed.

"Gee, you make my job sound good," said Jo, drily," I hope I don't lose it."

Elise asked me if I'd take her slacks over the next day and do them for her. I had become a fancy presser and accordingly was very popular with the sick bay girls.

The head doctor's housekeeper had dropped dead of a heart attack, and there was speculation as to who'd be assigned to the job in his household. None of us expected to get a good job like that because few alcoholics were given such work. (The I-A's might drink the doctor's



"A Fancy Presser"

private stock.) One middle-aged self-committed alcoholic got a housekeeping job and immediately became very unpopular with us. While we ate beans and herded maniacs, she'd come back to the ward from work each night and boast of her culinary prowess and recapitulate her menus. Night after night we'd had to hear about the blackberry pies and Waldorf salads and baked chicken that she'd prepared — and helped eat.

One by one the tired women in our dormitory dropped asleep, but I was wakeful, possibly due to the unaccustomed festal activities of the evening. Far off a train hooted, causing me to try to recapture the lines of that couplet (Edna Millay?) to the effect: "I never heard a choochoo train I didn't want to be on" and the thought seemed especially telling in Camarillo.

From nearby came the sound of a smothered sob. It was Elise giving away to open despair for the first time. Going to her bed I sat there

patting her hair, comforting her, but at the same time reflecting grimly that there was no solacing words for a sane person committed to a madhouse.

Presently she began talking brokenly of her pent-up bitterness, while I stared through the "grilled" window into a night made silky by the shimmer of a Jap melon moon.

"It's not Camarillo so much," she wept, "although of course the days on sick bay are ghastly, but it's that I can't visualize life after leaving here. I no longer love my husband or my parents—I'll never trust them again. But I have to go back to them because of my little girl. I'm afraid, actually afraid, of leaving this horrible place. I can't imagine what is to become of me."

"Do you feel you've been cured of drinking?"

"Billie, I honestly don't know. I don't know. One thing I do know, my husband will hold this over my head continually. If I drink at all, he'll send me right back; and he isn't above sending me back as a parole violator even if I don't drink."

"It's terrible, Elise," I agreed, "to think that whoever signs you out has that power over you. Are you sure a paroled alcoholic can be sent back even if she doesn't drink?"

"I've looked into that thoroughly, Billie, because I was afraid. I've asked all the return I-A's here, and the attendants, too. If your family wants to send you back they can. It's their word against yours, and a known drinker's word carries no weight. Furthermore, if your family is at all inclined to be vindictive—and you'd be surprised how vindictive some parents and hus-

bands and wives can be—they can send you back even if you don't drink merely by claiming you have questionable associates and aims. Knowing my husband as I do, I fully expect him to want me to jump when he cracks the whip in the future. If I never take another drink, he'll still make my life miserable, and when my twenty-month parole is up he can continue to make me suffer by threatening to take my little girl from me. Although he committed me here, he could easily get her custody by telling the court I've been a patient here, and why."

Elise and I talked at length then of I-A's we knew who'd had miserable experiences with overbearing and unsympathetic families. There was the young woman who'd sued her father and the State for committing her; and others whose domineering mothers had actually resented losing parental authority after their girls had grown up and attained a measure of independence. Some of these mothers would go to almost any length to get the upper hand again. Elise and I had seen friends of ours in the hospital receive letters from home that, had the doctors read them, would have shown the doctors past all doubt that these same families were unreasonably vengeful to past misconduct on the patient's part, real or fancied. Furthermore, I have a suspicion, unverified as yet, that once having been committed to a State institution, on any charge, has an unwarrantable effect on one's whole future. Unwarrantable, of course, in some cases. Exceptions are, undeniably, dangerous to make, but it is too bad that certain men and women committed as alcoholics by resentful and possibly mistaken families, are besmeared

henceforth to the point of not being eligible to hold civil service jobs or other positions of high trust, or to adopt a child, nor yet any of the ventures calling for an impeccable background.

As I say, I've not yet sought confirmation of these misgivings; but manifestly, being an ex-inmate is disadvantageous. Also, should an ex-inmate become involved in an accident or lawsuit, regardless of how blameless the ex-inmate happens to be, any opponent has but to mention one's former residence in an insane asylum to swing the tide of sympathy against him.

To see Elise give away like this was heartrending. All of the other women alcoholics I had met there were so dissimilar, seemingly having nothing in common save drinking and a certain air of forced jollity. Of them all, Elise appeared to be of the most delicate fibre, like a lovely sprite, gentle, unassuming, the beloved confidant of boring old ladies and invalids, respected and shielded by us who were older and hardier. It was impossible to imagine her being unpleasant even when drinking, although admittedly almost no one drinks to excess with grace. No doubt her people had done this to her as a protective measure, but the experience proved too harsh for her tender sensibilities. She was a pitiful example of the perennial failure of regimentation. So drastic a step as commitment devastated her. Whereas commitment self-assumed, as in the case of Margo and Jo, promised to be beneficial, with Elise enforced incarceration could never do more than wither her gentle spirit.

Self-pride, false or otherwise, must engender a great deal of the strength needed to combat

the liquor habit; an individual reluctant to admit that hospitalization in an asylum is in order, will feel the sense of stigma, however wrongfully, and if only subconsciously—but the person who signs himself in such a place has, right from the start, a wholesome state of mind, i.e., "I need help more than I need worry about the viewpoint of some of my unthinking friends."

Some of the mental patients felt this need of assuaging vanity, too. Now and again one would state pridefully—"I felt my mind slipping so I came straight to this hospital to be made well again."

This ratiocination doesn't seem necessarily erroneous. An attitude of self-determination is indispensable in any struggle for health, reason or character.

But fragile little Elise had been broken on the wheel. In these months she had lived with enough horror, deformity and tragedy to charge the rest of her life with sorrow.

She wept until a paling east heralded a new day for the hospital, if not for her.

CHAPTER XIV

At the laundry I became superintendent of the section.

Had anyone assigned me this task I would have resented it hotly, I'm afraid, but inasmuch as I assumed this new "position" of my own accord, it furnished me with perverse delight.

The little pixillated one who had been section swabber-outer, collapsed from malnutrition and had been carted off to sick bay for a period of forced feeding. Her aberration was remaining in status quo. If someone sat her down, she stayed there until forcibly moved. If she was told to brush her teeth, she brushed until her gums bled. If she was asked to mop the section she not only complied with such zeal as to wear thin spots on the floor, but she also invariably endangered the rest of the laundry by a copious distribution of mopping water. When she was ignored, and therefore taskless, she did nothing but stare vacantly into space, even neglecting to eat, so her visit to sick bay was a recurring event, that the nurses could forcibly feed her.

When Mrs. LeBrun discovered me busily wielding scrub brushes and Sani-flush, she asked

me with vexed amusement if I didn't think she could find someone else for these menial chores.

"Don't be silly," I replied gaily, "the Irish are always handy with mops!"

And undeniably I did make a better showing with brooms and buckets than I did with an iron.

A friend of mine once told me of the humiliation he'd felt when the depression took away his well-paid motion picture studio job and he'd been reduced to sweeping out a Hollywood laundry for a living. I reflected cheerfully that I was going him one better.

A typical day in the laundry can scarcely be described, as each new day brought even more fantastic incidents. Some of them would not be believed even if the censors let them by!

A fairly common basis for delusions is electricity. Wild were some of the theories a good many mental patients had about this force and its effects. One woman wore a rubber bathing cap night and day to ward off its evil influences. She was more than a bit on the odorous side from perspiration as a result. Another complained so incessantly of electricity and its evil influence on her that she was assiduously ignored. I was standing behind her one morning when her iron shorted and she ran screaming for help. It was another case of Wolf! Wolf! —no one believed the poor dame but me.

One girl told Mrs. LeBrun that she had to be transferred back to the ward because electricity was stretching her body out of shape.

"You could put your hand up to the elbow in me!" she mourned.

"Well," returned Mrs. LeBrun mildly, "I don't want to."

A male attendant who had some errand on our side of the laundry asked me one morning what I was "in for".

"Delusions of grandeur," I replied promptly.

"Really?" said he.

"Really," said I. "I thought I could drink Los Angeles dry."

Jo and I, in our lofty positions as distributors, had to settle minor squabbles, bestir the lazy and maintain a never-flagging watch for trouble. Mrs. LeBrun, however, unlike most attendants, never needed help. More than once Jo and I, hearts in our mouths, sprang to aid her when some frenzied maniac flourished a hot iron in her face. At such times Mrs. LeBrun never showed a trace of fear or lost her gentle calm. She would see us standing behind the pugnacious patient, poised to seize her arms, and with an almost imperceptible shake of her head would signal to us that she had everything under control. And she always had.

At other times, walking home from the laundry, a ding-y damsel might state plaintively that she didn't want to return to the ward, and attempt to run away. In similar situations most attendants got panicky and called for help. Mrs. LeBrun, in such a contretemps, would smile tolerantly at the malcontent and march her back to the ward by holding her wrist firmly but gently. It's a pity that more women of Mrs. LeBrun's temperament can't be found in mental hospitals. The attendants have such continuous and terrifying power over the lunatics and so seldom exercise this power intelligently.

Instinctively I felt Mrs. LeBrun to be kind, and therefore tolerant of very minor rule in-

fractions. However, my fear of all attendants was so ingrained that when a male alcoholic agreed to keep me supplied with sugar, he and I went to elaborate precautions to effect its transfer.

He would give me a small green tobacco can full of sugar. When it was empty, I'd conceal it on the bundle counter under the clothes. We had one young man who worked on our side of the laundry, at a press. I'd pass this youth, and instruct him from the corner of my mouth, Leavenworth style, to "get Ray". The latter would come over to the distaff side presently, and our wildly signaling eyebrows would indicate smuggling of the Navy's latest turret-chamber plans, at the very least. One male attendant, calling for his laundry and detecting this can of crystalline substance so tortuously changing hands, was convinced we were running a touch of dope.

These absurd maneuvers, nevertheless, were not without their savour of fun. When we learned later that our boss would cheerfully have emptied her own cupboard at home of sugar and coffee for us, some of the tang left the brew.

It entailed no hardship on the men to bring us things, because they, lordly creatures, had "ground parole", which meant they could walk unattended anywhere on the institution's six square miles. Whether this took in Camarillo town, a little village a few miles away, I do not know, but I do know the men went there to shop and were allowed to carry money. They weren't meant to have money on their persons, but their attendants never seemed to care.

Few women had ground parole. Someone

claimed this was only allowed to trusted women patients who had been sterilized. If this be true, the only conclusion I can draw is that the State is indifferent to its patients' conduct if there be no consequences.

Once I asked Mrs. LeBrun if she had ever observed that patients became disturbed more at any certain time.

"At a change in the weather or the full moon," she laughed.

Ricky is such an iconoclast he jeers at everything pro and con, such as the full of the moon having any effect on an insane person's quietude or lack of it. However, it appears plausible to me—no one denies racial memories and, as our savage ancestors were in heightened danger at such time, could not the restlessness and tenseness be atavistic—a primeval heritage?

It is probably coincidental, but I've often noticed I crave liquor more at the full of the moon! Speaking of craving, a man I-A in the laundry asked me, "How would you like a drink right now?"

"I wouldn't," I told him truthfully, "You see I'm a periodic drinker."

"That's my trouble," he chortled, "—and this is my period!"

Time dragged heavily for us all: Jo came up to ask how many days there were in the month of May. Ad libbing, I said:

"Forty days hath September, April, June and November,
All the rest have fifty-nine, except February,
And I wasn't here then."

Which is the way we all felt about months in the booby-hatch.

Flies the laundry had by the myriad, so an "execution chamber" was installed—a flat, leprous looking device that electrocuted the flies. Remarkable was the furore this caused, one patient even writing President Roosevelt asking him to enlist the aid of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The box itself was unpleasant, but not as unpleasant as the frequent and revolting jests to which it inspired the irrepressible Jo. Her favorite sport became consulting me endlessly and anxiously as to how I wanted our sandwiches prepared on the "barbecue pit".

Eat we certainly did, though without benefit of the "pit". Our dress-fronts bulged with bread after each trip to the dining hall, and upon arrival at the laundry, we'd race to my bailiwick, the section, there to make coffee and embellish our bread with bought or begged avocadoes or cheese. We weren't encumbered with tapeworms—these meals were our main ones for the day, as more often than not we couldn't eat the institution food.

"Did you ever think," said Jo, companionably, one afternoon, "that you'd wind up eating your meals on the floor of a bughouse can?"

"If I'd ever thought of it," I told her, I would not have dreamed I'd do it so contentedly."

We licked the last of our strawberry preserves from our fingers and smiled at one another cheerfully. Even an insane asylum is not so bad if one has a pal—and some jam.

At dinner that night (institutionally known as "supper") a young man alcoholic called Jake came to the water tap which was as close to us as he dared come, and ostensibly busied himself

drawing a drink.

"Wilma," he called, over the clatter of hundreds of metal bowls and cups, "meet me at seven tonight."

Seeing no attendants close by, I retorted, "Yeah, honk and I'll be right out!"

"I'll bring the boy wonder along to the sunroom," he said (meaning Philip), and disappeared. I thought I must not have heard correctly over the din. After all, five hundred nuts slupping soup create quite a little commotion.

After conferring with my cronies, however, I learned that the men, with their enviable freedom, could pass our sunroom window, so although we'd formerly ignored this room, we now invaded it to usurp a bridge table.

The sunroom was full of dour old ladies who apparently went with the woodwork — or crawled out of it. They didn't take kindly to our unexpected advent. Desperate were the strategies we resorted to in order to empty the room. I bewailed feelingly my conviction that I was coming down with smallpox. "Just look at the spots on my arms!" Alma advised us in a stage whisper that "fortunes were being told in the section". Jo announced loudly that she could feel pneumonia germs in the moist chill of approaching dusk.

None of our ruses worked. The old ladies knitted on adamantly. Gloria, spying me, expressed surprise at finding us in this stronghold of aniiity.

"I got a date with two guys at seven!" I confided in her ear happily. I felt like the toast of the regiment.

Just then there was a rustling in the bushes

below the window and voices of unmistakably masculine timbre filled the room. Three of the unhinged holding down the sunporch gasped with outraged righteousness and went to find the attendants. Right after them raced Cotton-top, Alma, and Gloria, catching them in the long corridor. There they thrust the informers' backs to the wall and told them with sinister convincingness what they would do to them if they tattled. This little uprising quelled, they returned to the sunroom. I was still worried.

"A Date With Two Guys at Seven"

"Forget it," said Alma. "It's our word against theirs, and we can always say they're having a new crop of delusions.'

Whether by intent or no, the ground immediately below Camarillo windows on the outside of the hospital is heavy planted with cacti, necessitating a cautious approach on the part of visitors. So whenever headlights of oncoming cars swooped down the nearest drive, our guests crouched hastily and truly distinguished was the profanity that would then emerge from the cacti.

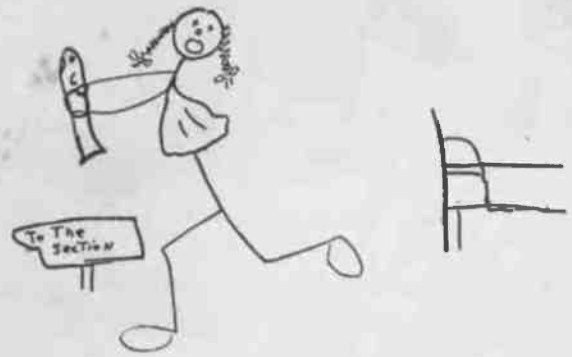
The windows from the inner or courtyard side of the buildings had no such hazard, and none of our windows had shades or blinds, not even those in the small dormitory sections. Nor could we turn out the lights of our own accord. On one side of us was a ward for men, known as an "open" ward. This meant that at any time any one of the men patients living on this ward could step out into the courtyard for a smoke or a stroll—another example of the favoring of men patients over women. No woman's ward was an "open" ward. "Woman's place" is in the home as far as psychiatrists figure.

Therefore I can state without bias a fact that can easily be confirmed by anyone who cares to visit the hospital shortly after dark; the fact that the men attendants and patients were free to gaze in our windows from the courts at bedtime; also the men attendants, some men patients, and any casual passerby could play peeping-Tom from the hospital's exterior, which wasn't pleasant. Privacy, among other valuable dues, is unattainable when you're the guest of the State.

Those of us who cared, which included all the alcoholics and the more lucid nuts, got around this embarrassing dilemma by undressing in bed or under our nighties, perforce indulging in upper berth tactics or strenuous gymnastics.

On this night I would have done better not to retire. My first annoyance was to discover that Letty, who smuggled me warm flannel gowns from the sick bay stock, had brought me a damaged remnant that barely reached my floating ribs. I didn't find this nearly as funny as she seemed to. But the spark that ignited a super-

detonation came when I stretched luxuriously full-length in bed, and my weary feet came to rest upon a chill, naked and exceedingly defunct fish!



"An Exceedingly Defunct Fish"

Of course, I knew who was responsible, and I reached for this corpse with shrinking fingers to hurl it at the ecstatically overcome Elise. She was saved by the sudden entrance of a feared relief attendant. Shielding the repugnant object with my robe I went up the hall to the utility room and buried the dank thing in the trash barrel.

"What's the idea?" I stormed at Elise upon my return. "The fish I gave you was a teeny-weeny, highly edible tid-bit, daintily gift-wrapped and hygienically high over your bed, while you expect me to sleep cheek by jowl with a frozen Moby Dick!"

"You said you didn't like to sleep alone, and anyway, it's Friday!" said Elise, hysterical with mirth.

Each patient returning to the hospital from a

a day out must be searched, so I couldn't figure out how she had smuggled in the fish. I never did find out. The next morning I went privately to exhume the corpse, knowing Philip would put it on Elise's tray for lunch if I gave it to him at the breakfast lineup. Unfortunately, its stench had compelled Miss Seton to remove it during the night.

This fish feud bade fair to become as bitter and prolonged as that of the Hatfields and the McCoys.

Philip, at my request, gave me a package of codfish. It appeared on my tray one day heavily wrapped and inscribed, "Fish, fish, danger, do not open, fish, danger." I put it under Elise's pillow. The shredded codfish wound up in my shoes the next day, as I learned to my sorrow after I'd been wearing them for an hour or two.

Resolving to deliver to Elise the coup de grace, I set Philip and my other male acquaintances with ground parole, to searching for a live frog for me. Frogs there were in plenty nearby; they made the Camarillo nights even more dismal with their sombre croakings. I planned to tie a string around its neck and put it in Elise's bed. Unfortunately, the best the boys could capture for me was a mouse, and because I wouldn't touch it myself, Elise won the final round.

One of the old ladies who had been in the sunroom during its invasion had told us benevolently not to worry about her—that she'd never "squeal" on us.

Thereafter she attempted to involve us in the most preposterous schemes. The next day in the laundry, she asked me if I could get a message to Ray. When I told her I could, she said the

message was that "Miriam, on Ward 7, wanted to see him—she needed help". This no doubt meant that Ray was to contrive an encounter with Miriam in the big exercise courtyard, which was coeducational, as soon as possible.

Dutifully I relayed the message. Ray frowned, and asked me to tell Miriam that I hadn't seen him.

"Very well," I returned, coldly. "But I'd sure hate to need help and ask it of someone like you."

"She is a mental patient, Wilma," he replied, with exasperation.

Still, I felt that maybe Miriam merely needed cigarettes or something, and it seemed doubly unkind of Ray to refuse aid until he knew what she wanted. Not liking to relay a disappointment, I asked the old lady to tell Miriam that Ray "would try".

"That's marvelous!" the old lady told me, confidingly, "Miriam is going to get a letter out through Ray. The letter is to Sheriff Biscailluz, and we'll all get out!"

The average mental patient's ever-lurking hatred of the alcoholics was steadily increasing. They made our lives miserable by envenomed verbal attacks, given chiefly in the absence of the attendants. Most of the mental patients felt that drinkers were wantons or lechers—complete moral lepers.

In years of association with drinkers, I've found that more often than not the opposite is true. Alcoholic excess, with its ensuant lowering of vitality provides an effective brake for primitive urges. The most lustful men and women I've observed were people who didn't

drink or smoke or overeat, and thus became prurient through an over-abundance of energy.

Furthermore, the mere habit of drinking will not, at least not for many years, undermine a basically fine character structure. I've known ascetic people who drank and licentious people who were teetotalers. And vice versa, of course. This merely illustrates that it doesn't necessarily follow that intoxication leads to lewdness. Nonetheless, the mental patients could hardly be aware of this, despite having for example such obviously chaste women as Jo and Alma and Elise. Many more of the alcoholics were fundamentally virtuous, I'm sure, but so many of us would curse upon provocation or jest with such ribaldry that we couldn't find it in our hearts to blame the mental patients for regarding us as demi-mondes. So their hatred of us was understandable. Why should low drunken women, they contended with justice, be turned loose after a mere four months, when they, God-fearing creatures one and all, must stay imprisoned for years and possibly forever?

Every time an alcoholic was freed from the institution, one or more mental patients became "disturbed". Whenever they viewed one of the drunk's blithe return to the outside world, some poor nut had a relapse. It seems every bit as unfair to the mentally ill to let them continually view these clockwork departures as it is unfair to ask the sane to spend months among the demented. For both types of ailments, segregation is the logical procedure.

Self-committed alcoholics were frequently assured at the psycophathic wards that segregation was practiced in Camarillo, but segregation

was, during my stay there, just a consummation to be desired.

Nasty as they were to us, we continually reminded ourselves to be considerate of the pixillated. When I heard that certain "good" patients were to be taken by truck to Oxnard to view a ball game, and that my name was on the list, in an unaccustomed rush of generosity, I went to our charge attendant, Mrs. Read, and asked that a nut be allowed my privilege.

"After all, Mrs. Read," I told her with very conscious rectitude, "I know when I'll get out, (I hope) and some of these poor things will be here for life!"

Mrs. Read smiled at me as one smiles at a child for proffering a well-nibbled lollipop.

"That's nice of you, Wilma, but no alcoholics are going. A later order just came, forbidding them the privilege."

CHAPTER XV

The Glee Club was organized, disorganizing most of the hospital in the process. Any small event is magnified out of all proportion in an institution.

Then, too, many of the mental patients felt they were potential Tettrazinis and Carusos. Others of us, harboring no delusions about the quality of our singing, still hoped to get by the tryouts in order to have some recreation.

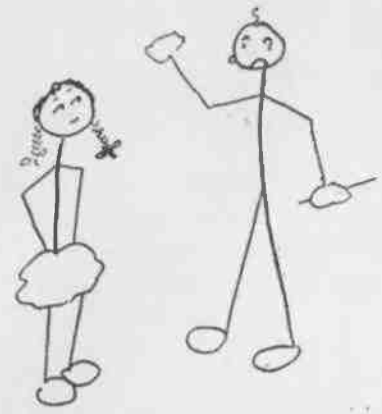
The Glee Club was held in the attendants' dining hall, which was a smaller edition of ours, and was conducted by a young man attendant who seemed more disposed to be friendly and gay with the patients than the other employees.

Part singing has its problems and, as few of us knew with certainty whether we were contraltos or baritones, this young man soon was a fit subject to be a patient.

Per usual, the men stayed in one half of the room and we in the other.

"What part do you sing?" Rourke, the attendant asked me.

"I sing bass" I submitted, coyly. "Now can I sit with the boys?"



"I Sing Bass"

Even after studying with the Camarillo Glee Club, I still do not know what part I sing. I suspect it is part on key and part off.

Although the attendant labored commendably, it must be admitted our Glee Club was not an unqualified success. The chief reason, of course, was the lack of talent. There were almost three thousand patients in Camarillo and among that number there were some really good voices, but there is a standing order at the hospital to the effect that only "good" patients may participate in any social activity. Ergo, those of us who mopped and ironed and sewed the most vigorously became the carolers, and if we had Jenny Lind or John Charles Thomas, they must have been on bad wards in "restraint". The Glee Club, from the Staff's point of view, was a reward of labor, not good therapy, as group singing is generally considered.

Mr. Rourke must have regretted our colorless days, for at the end of the first Glee Club session, he suggested we put away the chairs and dance for half an hour. We could hardly believe our ears.

The first person to claim me for a dance was my abject adorer from the laundry, Elmer. I've never walked into a buzzsaw, but I imagine the sensations are somewhat the same. As a dancer Elmer had no co-ordination whatsoever, merely a grim determination to cover as many feet as possible, both square and partner's. Although chiefly concerned with maintaining my equilibrium, I was aware that the others had all left the floor, partly in self-defense and partly to enjoy the show. Some of the men were frankly wiping tears of laughter from their eyes. Jo told me later our terpsichorean triumph should have been entitled "The Flight of the Stumble-Bees". The pay-off was at the end of the "dance". While I clutched at the wall for support and endeavored to regain my wind, he gazed at me with worshipping eyes and breathed, "Gawd, but you're a wonderful dancer!"

My next partner was better, although it was too obvious that his ward bathed on Wednesdays and this was Tuesday. He was a marvelous dancer and I would have enjoyed myself completely had he not talked to himself the entire time, interspersing his meaningless words with the low, ominous laughter usually reserved for the Black Coffin program on the radio. When the music ceased, I started to return to my chair, whereupon he uttered his first lucid words.

"Where do you think you're going?" he

growled, menacingly.

"Nowhere," I stammered hastily, returning to his side, from where a highly amused Philip rescued me.

The Glee Club flourished for some weeks despite opposition from many quarters. At one meeting we were chaperoned by the sewing room charge, a suspicious, heavy-jowled woman with the largest hands and smallest heart conceivable. She was aghast when she heard that we had received permission to dance, and while we waltzed around she was frenziedly watching everyone's midriff with a caliper eye. Noticing this, I studied the dancers, too, but saw nothing at which even the most ardent bluenose could take exception. Nevertheless, a week or so later the Glee Club was discontinued.

All of the attendants seemed to worry overmuch when the male and female patients were in close proximity. Sometimes in the dinner lines our ward would catch up with a line of men bound for the same destination. At such times our attendants would flutter around us agitatedly. They needn't have worried. The men were never such as to cause any of us to get "disturbed". In fact, "Pick yourself out a millionaire, girls!" became a byword because of Dr. Stoddard telling us at Psycho about the "Wealthy men's sons" who signed themselves in. There were a few wealthy, cultured men in Camarillo, but the ward lineups of shambling, often deformed, denim-clad men was never aught but depressing to us.

It puzzled the alcoholics not to meet more of their former cronies in the hospital. I, for one, know a great many people who drink far more

and oftener than I, but these people seem to stay at least two jumps ahead of the asylum butterfly net. The only person I met there that I had known before was Sally, the girl I had befriended after Lincoln Heights, but she was on another ward and I seldom saw her. She looked so dissipated as to be the best argument in Camarillo against drinking. If one year could raddle her so, she constituted a sermon in herself. The mental patients provided no moral: I used to beg the attendants to point out one person who'd lost her reason from drinking, but they couldn't.

Of course we all talked freely among ourselves about drinking and our present and future attitude toward it. The men patients, as one, claimed they would resume drinking immediately they were freed. Of course, this may have been sheer masculine bravado, but it was a little wearying to hear them all maintain that they would have a drink on such and such a date before they were one mile from the hospital.

The majority of the women patients claimed they were through with liquor, but even as they would announce this, one could see a doubt cloud their eyes. Some hoped to drink again in "moderation", which according to the best authorities, is unattainable for alcoholics, potential or otherwise.

My own attitude toward the problem was what it was before commitment and what it is now. "Other drinkers have won the fight and so shall I." If I succeed it will not be due to Camarillo, but on the other hand, I shall not let my resentment of those lost miserable months deter me from fighting the vice unremittingly.

Of the whole motley crew of guzzlers, Letty remarked, "I thought I knew every lush in Los Angeles County, but after I graduate from here, I certainly won't lack for partners!"

"Liquors cures" there are by the score, but I think there is one method that should be given a try, although the idea is not original with me. Surely if well-wishers of the drunkard took motion pictures of the victim when he was in his cups, upon his being shown the developed film, his stricken vanity would cause his moral strength to be "as the strength of ten thousand" when temptation was again upon him.

However, I'm afraid too few people have enough patience with a drinker to attempt any means of bringing about rehabilitation. Most people feel about a drunk as does the mental patient of whom I inquired:

"Are you in Camarillo for drinking?"

"God, no!" she replied testily, "I'm crazy, but not that crazy!"

Even though an avowed heathen, in accordance with my policy to miss nothing, I went to church one Sunday.

First I told Philip via a billet-doux, in the hope he could get away from his cafeteria work long enough to go too. His answer read:

"If I thought we could share hymn books, I would go each time, but as it is, I have to work overtime here to keep that new kitchen drunk from beating my time—I've seen him making eyes at you. But I'll lay a wager with anybody, if he can beat me at stealing for you he's okay. If he gets you one chop, I'll get you two, plus a piece of pie. I'll certainly give him a sweet time trying to outdo me in the art of stealing.

He may be a better lovemaker than I (I'm hopeless at that), but baby, I have the technique of lifting hot steaks from stoves.

"I like your hair like that, but please don't wear those dark glasses at the table. I can't see the twinkle of your eyes. The Baron told me this morning about you—'Boy, you got something in that landscape'. He always refers to people by such odd names so no one will know who he's talking about. He always calls my attention to any particularly nice thing about you, the way you smile or laugh or even cry. I hope I won't have to see you cry again as you did the other day. Try to be happy to please me. Philip."

Ricky fumed so at my being able to exchange three and even four long notes daily with Philip and write him but one short letter a week, that to mollify him, I finally took a long chance and "kited" a letter out to him. (Note the gangster's moll vernacular.) Having no way of telling if it went safely, I had an uneasy mind, and it was too bad the church on this Sunday had no confessional. Church is held twice a month in Camarillo, once Catholic and again Protestant. On this day it was Protestant, although I couldn't learn which denomination.

It was held in the attendants' dining hall and was, of course, thoroughly policed.

The only lasting impression I received from my theological excursion was the oddity of our visiting saviors resembling borderline or outright psychopathic cases, while the majority of the congregation looked normal.

This strange sensation was intensified when I went back on the ward. We had that day, as

relief attendant, a woman who looked and acted far goofier than any patient in the institution. I can't speak of men attendants, for I didn't see them all during my stay, but I do know that there are at least three women working there who look downright cracked. It would be needlessly cruel to limn these women: should they read this and fail to recognize themselves, their fellow-workers will unfailingly know to whom I refer. How the doctors could work with them day after day and fail to note the lack of correlation in their speech, the inability to focus their gaze quickly, the inco-ordination of their gait, is puzzling.

One of these women, in street clothes, asked a new attendant one day in her gutteral, stammering way, to give her a lift to Oxnard. The new attendant told her, in a soothing, kindergarten teacher manner, "Now, dear, you know I can't take you away with me, but I'll be glad to bring you back just whatever you want!"

At this critical moment, a third attendant who knew them both, jabbed the new attendant's elbow and hissed in her ear, "Quiet, you dope! That dame works here!"

And it was this stuttering ball of fire who was on duty in our ward when we came home from church. Puzzled, I sat near her, watching as her head lolled around aimlessly and her eyes rocked about like a month-old infant's. Then I glanced around the room at the Ward 6 nuts. Being Sunday, most of them were nicely dressed, and calmly reading or knitting. It looked like one of the quieter afternoons at the Ebell Club. A feeling of unreality stole over me. Was I in the "Reversia" of the comic strips, or in the

throes of a nightmare? Only the attendant looked crazy. Or maybe I was. One wonders, when one is committed.

Nearby, where she could see us both, sat the second afternoon attendant, an unusually beautiful girl about twenty-two years old whom we adored because she was so jolly and lenient. Obviously this kid could read my thoughts, and as she told me later, she always had difficulty keeping a straight face around this imbecilic-appearing attendant. Now she would look at me and then at the goofy nurse and her facial muscles would quiver. When I sighed and shook my head in bewilderment, the young nurse rose and hastily left the room, her handkerchief stuffed in her mouth.

Sundays were always miserable days in Camarillo if one didn't have company. To sit around unable to smoke, and hear other patients called for visitors, was hard. The bright spot of the day was the roast beef for lunch and its accompanying knife and fork. Why the knife, I do not know. I doubt if a self-respecting carving knife could faze "Ferdinand", which we dubbed our Sunday meat. It was inevitable that this "boon" should inspire another of my limping parodies:

"Owed" to Our Sunday Lunch

(With apologies to Lawson, Leaf, Disney and anyone else who wants to make something of it.)

There once was a bull—a magnificent bull
In a pasture in old Camarillo,
There he romped and he stomped until he was dunked
By Jones in some hot mantequilla.

He was fated at last, to break our meat fast,
All the inmates assembled for luncheon,
We gnawed with a vim but "first blood" went to him,
No one got to first base with their crunchin'.

CHORUS

Ferdinand, Ferdinand, that tough but toothsome old bovine,
Ferdinand, Ferdinand, served with garlic and gravy he's divine.
Oh you can have fish-eggs and sec-sauted froglegs,
But we will still take Ferdinand!

Ferdinand, Ferdinand, the bull with the iron-hewn carcass,
Ferdinand, Ferdinand, our molars are chipped in the fracas,
Ferdinand, Ferdinand, over bridges he gets the decisions,
Upper-plates grate and disintegrate,
When sparring with Ferdinand.

Ferdinand, Ferdinand, we greet him so gladly on Sundays,
Ferdinand, Ferdinand, we recall him sadly on Mondays,
Ferdinand, Ferdinand, we eat him so very politely,
With a knife and fork dent him, but never can rend him,
For he's never learned to roast.

Ferdinand, Ferdinand, the bull with the delicate flavor,
Ferdinand, Ferdinand, he's a mark of Sabbath-day favor
Ferdinand, Ferdinand we face each seventh day light,
We eat beans nice and meek, for six days in the week,
To earn Ferdinand on toast!

On special occasions such as Easter, Mother's Day, Fourth of July, etc., we had, from the motion picture amplifier, music with our lunch. Whether the projection booth phonograph was haywire or the music selector's taste morbid, I do not know, but that was without a doubt the most miserable music imaginable. Never did we have it but what one or more of the nuts would get disturbed, right at the table. Jo and I, too, must be unstable emotionally, for on Mother's Day the wailing dirge-like music caused us both to burst into tears. Life in a madhouse has its own threnody without that.

At breakfast the next morning I adroitly transferred my accustomed grapefruit from Philip to the table and beamed upon my table-mates.

"Look in this magazine he handed me, too," I boasted. "Six pieces of bacon. Boy, I'm living better here than I do at home!"

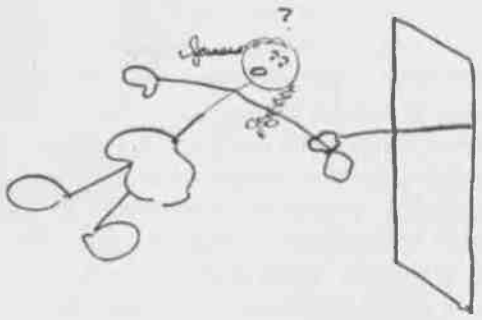
"Jake left a bowl of soft-boiled eggs on this chair," said Cottontop. "If I'd known I'd have so much fun in the booby-hatch, I'd have gone crazy long ago. Look at the Baron; he's going to slip us a package."

"The Baron" was a mild-mannered, pleasant mental patient who never seemed to work, but wandered officiously around the dining hall twirling a towel. He was very fond of Philip and from time to time delivered things to me from him. This morning he gave us a small package of hot muffins from the attendants' dining room. Our morning attendant, an unusually friendly and jocular nurse, walked up just then, her twinkling eyes noting our guilty expressions and every detail of our table.

"I see I'm going to have muffins for breakfast," she commented blandly, and passed on.

In all likelihood we didn't deceive many of our nurses for long about any mischief or depredations. The majority of them probably thought "Oh, let the poor fools have their fun." It was apparent the alcoholics were trusted a bit more than the mental patients because, with all our faults, we were never apt to become "disturbed".

Quite a hectic day followed at the laundry. Two of our men I-A's were leaving. One came to the doorway to bid me goodbye. When I shook hands with him, he started to jerk me out of sight through the door and I almost got kissed in farewell. I shouldn't have broken away; it would be distinguishing to be the only female to get away with a little necking in the cloistered precincts of Camarillo.



"Started to Jerk Me Out of Sight"

Everyone seemed to want to loaf. Jo and I had a terrible time making one of our loco ladies give up a correspondence trick she'd evolved.

She had a roll of toilet paper and was writing maudlin messages of cheer on each leaf, one or more of which she'd thrust in every pocket of the clean garments ready to leave the laundry.

Another patient, a staid, middle-aged woman who ordinarily worked quietly at a press, seemed to have been bitten by a jitter-bug. She stood before her press working efficiently enough, but her feet were constantly jigging and her right hand describing fanciful arcs in the air.

The young man in charge of the male laundry workers passed me.

" 'In the groove' " I said, indicating the dancer.

He nodded, twiddling two fingers beside his ear as he responded, " 'Truckin' on down'!"

Jo, the dope, was having a barrel of fun. She stood beside another press so dismantled as to reveal its springs. She wore an apron and from somewhere had unearthed a pancake turner. Using a round of steel-wool as a hamburger and a sprinkling bottle as sauce, she pretended to cook this hamburger on the press, all the while hawking her wares like a hot-dog seller at the beach. Later we took turns giving each other rides in the canvas laundry prams. We were in high spirits and figured that since we were already in the nuthouse we could act as we pleased.

Verna, an over-sexed religious fanatic, was having an attack of the muse and kept bringing me her poems to view. Many of them smacked of a nymphomaniac taking it to the Lord in prayer.

I had remarked facetiously in her presence that Ricky was probably out with a blond. She wrote this for me:

Love

God, give me courage to trust my man
If I do not hear the click of the latch on the gate
Just as the sun goes down—
Still the beating of my heart to peace,
Knowing his way is ordered by Thy Grace.
Knowing his love for me abides
In every place where he may be that delays his coming.
Help me, God, to trust my man.
This is the measure of my love for him
And his love for me.
To do this, I must trust you, God,
To keep him where he walks at sundown, tonight."

Here are two more of her poems:

Two Rooms

The pettiness of two rooms—stifle me
A whirring laundry oppressive with motors,
And a long ward where sleep and rest and bickering
hold sway.
Two rooms! When all the sun of day and moon of night
is outside,
Outside where the wind blows gusts—that we see only
as dust
On an ironing board cover.

Thank God for that five minute's grace when we walk
in double-file,
Guarded at head and rear—but still we see trees and
flowers;
Pet a cat or dog that lives in freedom in this prison,
Fed by scraps from the prisoners' table.
I thank God for this five minutes of grace that
intervenes
Between two rooms—

Asylum Bath

At the end of a day's routine, the girls are home for
the bath,
We have no lolling-hour in a high bathtub of languor-
ous suds,
In again, out again, Finnegan—is our Lady of the Bath.
Wise or foolish, sane or sober, everyone is roll-called
Into the shower—stands self-consciously around
In the tile-walled, tile-floored room, like so many
gawky boys
At the edge of the ol' swimmin' hole.
Some modestly hold a towel.
One stubbornly wears a pink petticoat
The nurse rips off—we've seen the Mexican woman
Wear it month after month. The rest of us giggle
Embarrassedly—maliciously. If we have to
Get over our prudery—why shouldn't she?
The State soap skids around the tile
Women wash long hair thick with suds.
The two minutes' warmth. In again, out again, Finnegan.

It's like sunshine and mother to aching, lonely bodies,
Stiff with rheumatism—some gnarled with unwanted-
ness,
Women alone—living in a herd—and across the courts,
Men alone likewise live.
We pin sheets to our shower windows
Proof from curiosity or love,
Only the warm water stealing down our bodies
Is like a kiss of Nature to compensate
Two minutes of warmth—twice a week
To prisoned hearts.

Verna also showed me a long epic-type poem about an iris that I found truly beautiful, and I'm sorry I didn't copy it while there.

The cats and dogs she mentioned in her poem were voluntary inmates. The cats, sagacious as cats innately are, barricaded themselves discreetly from the unpredictable patients behind basement grills. From this safe vantage they faced with never-ending astonishment the plenitude of bread and beans the conciliatory screwballs thrust at them.

The few hospital dogs were big and canny, always managing to elude proffered pats of uncertain portent.

A tender-hearted patient had built a cage for a family of abandoned fledglings. I managed to get in a terrible tempest over these. In the court one day, viewing the plainly uncomfort-

able birdlings, a very young mental patient and I argued the nestlings were grown too big for their cage and were matured enough to be freed. About eight screwballs, including "Mrs. Hitler", insisted they should stay in their cramped quarters. It bade fair to be a free-for-all with the ill-starred birds as unwilling pucks, until a vexed attendant separated us all by main force. The little girl and I won a secret victory by taking with us the cage's latch as we were sent away in disgrace.

Thoughts of poetry and all else but mail fled from our minds when we started home in the afternoon. As usual, I had a letter from Ricky. Upon reading the first few lines, however, I staggered to a chair. A startled Jo took my letter from nerveless fingers.

"What's wrong, Billie?"

"We've been trying to keep from Ricky's family where I am and why and now a relative of his read, by mistake, my last letter to him—and now the whole family knows the worst!"

Jo, without further ado, read his letter. She found,

".... having read it, she agrees with your doctor that you write incoherent letters. I never have any difficulty understanding what you write, but she claims the letter contained the ravings of unbalanced mind—that she couldn't make any sense from it."

"What did you say in the letter, Billie?" wondered Jo.

"Oh, nothing. Nothing at all," I moaned. "*That* was the letter in which I asked for a jump-rope, some jacks, and some chalk for hop-scotch!"

CHAPTER XVI

Alma went home. Few alcoholics leave the hospital without some form of hazing, so we prepared for her a diploma, mortar-board and gown.

Cottontop was to be sent home next. She bemoaned incessantly the considerable poundage the lima bean diet had given her. When she had but a week to go, she begged us to help her lose five pounds in that one last week.

"Don't let me have a thing to eat but vegetables, and if I lose five pounds this week I'll send you a carton of cigarettes when I get out."

Naturally we couldn't overlook an opportunity like that and at every meal from then on, we assumed rigid restriction of her diet. When a patient dislikes an item on the institution menu, she takes it away to give to another patient at her table. Thus when she bore her laden tray to our table, we all snatched at her food, leaving nothing but beets or turnips. It was pitiful to hear her wailings as her food disappeared. Even the Turkish woman at our table unbent from her usual aloofness and ate Cottontop's soup, although she complained all Camarillo

soup tasted strongly of "peter-salt", a malapropism we all felt was particularly apt.

I have received a note from Philip written on the back of a typewritten hospital menu. Wistfully we studied the dishes listed: Lima Beans Milanaise — Brown Betty Pudding — Green Salad—

"Must be the attendants' menu," I said. Jo was frowning over the slip of paper. Suddenly she whooped.

"Do you realize this is our own menu—as it goes into the State Capitol reports? Lima Beans Milanaise is when they are served all gummy and faintly red; green salad is that very dirty and dressingless lettuce we get; and Brown Betty is where Jones uses up all the stale bread on us!"

A closer perusal of the menu proved she was right. So for better reading we turned to Phil's note.

"Dear Billie: I ordered some penguins and elephants for you, carved from soap by a patient in the O. T. shop. The attendant said I couldn't go there today unless the kitchen had something that needed repair—so I broke a chair.

"Mrs. Horton says I must be terribly in love with you to cook your meals.

"Last night a knife was missing, so they ordered us all searched before we were allowed to go back to the wards. They didn't find the knife, but I'll swear Jake and I had everything transportable on us but the kitchen range and I think John had a piece of that! They didn't take the food from us, though, so here's some roast beef for sandwiches.

"Some obscure sorrow has taken possession of

me today. I feel as if I'll bust if I don't get away from here soon. Any place would be better than this—the whole atmosphere is saturated with unhappiness and grief. What a black hole of despair this place must be for some of the semi-mental patients—those with no prospect of leaving here. If I didn't have someone as lovable as you to look after I'd go over the hill. I think I can promote the shampoo soap you want. How are your cigarettes holding out? Could you send me some stationery? I'm about out and would hate to start writing you on 'Camarillo stationery'. I wish the doctor would restore your privileges, so you could go to the ball game in the big courtyard today. Philip."

There was a great deal of agitation about the place because the Staff was giving Dr. Lafferty, the hospital's head, a surprise birthday dinner. All attendants were supposed to go, and they were charged a dollar a plate. It was held in the paroled patients' dining-room and all of our kitchen sweethearts had to work until midnight, preparing and serving the chicken and ice cream and cleaning up afterwards. Of course they had to be at work by six A. M. the next day.

For their labor, our boy friends were served a plate of beans at midnight.

Feeling about this ran high throughout the hospital, so a few days later these boys were offered a nice dinner party for their services. They refused, since it would only mean more work, and asked if they might have a small dance instead. This was granted, but later rescinded, because it would cause too much resentment among the uninvited patients. The outcome of the whole affair was that each man was

presented with three packs of cigarettes and a cigar.

Jo joined her nagging with others, that I should attempt to have my "privileges" restored. For some time I had been denied going out for the day with my people; I had never had court parole; and now Glee Club was forbidden me. So I left a note for the Ward 6 doctor.

"Dear Dr. Tompkins: It's a shame to take up your time over a minor matter, but I'd like to explain why I've requested the return of my privileges. It isn't the privileges themselves I regret, though they are, naturally pleasant—it's the loss of face their absence implies. I fear that my record reading "denied privileges" will reflect against me and I am anxious to appear as creditable as possible under the circumstances.

"Inasmuch as I went for luncheon to a place that sold beer in entire unawareness of rule-breaking, and I did not write to anyone in code as the Staff assumed from my unthinking brevity, won't you please ask Dr. Barrett to restore my privileges? It makes me feel like a pariah to stay indoors while patients who came two months later go out to exercise together.

"Mother was very sorry to miss you a week ago. She can get up but seldom and each time she has come it's been our misfortune that her visit coincided with your day away from the hospital. She hopes to talk with you on her next visit this coming Sunday.

"Please, Dr. Tompkins, believe me when I tell you it isn't simply a desire for idle amusement that motivates my request. It's a sincere hope of regaining my status as a patient considered

trustworthy, that my chart will be unmarred during my remaining weeks under your care — a hope just as sincere as my hope of being a discharged patient you will be proud of.

"I'm so anxious for Dr. Barrett to understand —I think you do.

Sincerely,

WilmaWilson."

(Mentioning Dr . Barrett was merely a "face-saver" for Dr. Tompkins. When I'd requested the return of privileges verbally, she'd passed the buck to Dr. Barrett, maintaining he'd denied them. Despite this, I knew, and she knew I knew, that she'd taken them from me and could give them back again, red tape that required his signature or no.)

In reply I received what the little boy shot at. Nuthin! I think my plea was assigned to the same pigeonhole as another letter to her—an unsigned, unfinished letter Jo and I found on the section floor. It read:

"Dr. Tompkins,

Dear Madame:

I can control myself as well as the next person. Do you really consider sterilization necessary?"

Oh, well. The doctors as a whole provided us with many hearty laughs.

Dr. Barrett, he of the phobia about alcoholics, came in the laundry one day to select a girl to act as nursemaid for his baby daughter. He pointed to Jo, but when Mrs. LeBrun explained our Jo was an I-A, he recoiled in horror. After

examining us all in slave-block fashion, he finally settled on Verna. We were stupefied. As Jo said,

"Darned if I'd place in charge of my children a female who never stops discussing sex except to misquote from the Bible!"

Ricky, on one of his visits, requested an interview with my doctor to receive some suggestions on how he might help me after I left the hospital, should I evince a desire to drink. As usual, my doctor had no time to see anyone about my case, so he was referred to Dr. Browne. I had never spoken to this doctor and she had not the faintest idea which patient I was. She had been pointed out to me and I had marveled that so young and pretty a girl had become an M. D. so early in life.

She was very affable with Ricky, (most women are!) and they had quite a discussion.

".... I don't like to discourage any romance," she told him, among other cheerful statistics, "but Wilma's chances of coming back here are about 90 per cent."

"Her periods of drinking have occurred consistently farther apart without increasing in intensity," submitted the crestfallen Ricky.

"That's favorable," agreed the doctor, "but you tell me she feels a sense of stigma in being here. That is absolutely the wrong frame of mind. If she can't take commitment in the right spirit, it lessens her chances for ultimate cure."

They talked thusly for forty minutes or so, removing planks from under me every two minutes, from all I could gather.

"Wow!" exclaimed Gloria, when the girls heard of this crushing pow-wow. "You must

have ironed one of the doctor's surgery coats!"

Gloria left shortly thereafter on her parole job. We missed her very much. A pleasant, attractive, wholesome young woman, we always found it difficult to remember she was a mental patient. We never discussed her malady with her, but we heard an unconfirmed rumour that she suffered from melancholia. In view of her humour, this seemed odd. Certainly she acted sanely enough and was so regarded by the Staff or she would not have been given a job outside the institution.

With Alma and Gloria gone and Cottontop joyously preparing to leave, a pall settled over the rest of us. I, for one, felt that I couldn't bear another moment.

Rumour spread through the asylum that the new Governor had said that all insane patients capable of working daily at hospital jobs should not be held longer. Most of the ding-y formulated elaborate plans for their futures. It was pitiful to watch their waiting for release and to hear their excited scheming. But the only one who left then got merely as far as the hospital business manager's home—there to act in the capacity of housekeeper. When he had been searching for a housekeeper, Jo was praying he'd select Ada. This was the little nut who had been section-swabber at the laundry before I took over; the one who would diligently perform one task until forcibly stopped.

"Just think!" Jo pictured, "Mr. and Mrs. Lacy would leave for the theatre. 'Peel some potatoes, Ada,' they'd say. When they returned they wouldn't be able to see Ada for the pile of peelings in the kitchen. 'You can quit now, Ada,'

they'd bellow. But she wouldn't be able to hear them, because the parings would shut off all sound, and this would go on until their house bulged!" Jo was estactic at the prospect of a mountain of peelings.

"You darned fool," I said, affectionately.

Again show night rolled around. I kept a list of the shows, as one more device for marking the passage of time. I also had two jars of colored, dried beans at the laundry. Each day I'd ritualistically move a bean from the first to the second jar, and oh, how slowly the first jar diminished! The girls maintained it was poor practice to so carefully gauge the time, but I couldn't desist. At any hour, if asked how much longer I had to stay, I could reply accurately, in this fashion, "One more dance, six more shows, eleven more baths, and one hundred and nine more trips to the blankety-blank dining room."

My list of shows reads as follows:

LEGEND: 1 star—punk, 2 stars—punker, 3 stars — punkest, and 4 stars — super-collosal punkest.

1. Man With Two Faces.*
2. Criminals of the Air.***
3. Making the Headlines.**
4. Law of the Texan.****
5. Paid to Dance.*
6. Main Event.*
7. West of Cheyenne.********
8. I Am the Law.
9. The Lady Objects.***

10. South of Arizona.********
11. California Frontiers.********
12. Stagecoach Days (or daze).*
13. Colorado Trail.*******
14. Legion of Terror.**
15. Counterfeit Lady.****
16. Pioneer Trail.********
17. Highway Patrol.**
18. (I can't remember this one, I was too excited by then.)

On this night at the show, Jo and I had been chatting idly during the usual long wait until the projectionist got lined up, when we noted a stir on the men's side of the hall. A man started walking toward the women's side, carrying a huge bouquet of wild flowers. We were nervous to find it was Elmer, face shining with love and his pants pressed for the occasion.

He made for me as unerringly as an avenging fury and, bowing, thrust the posies at me while fifteen hundred men patients cried, as with one throat, "B-o-o-o!"

For this, I had still more privileges taken away, although it was difficult to find them to take. I was not allowed to attend the next dance and my writing tablet was taken from me.

I was by this time so fed up with everything that I didn't care what they did, if I were but freed July the eighth. That was my Bastille day.

On the way home from the show, we were held up for a miserable hour in Ward 4. Some patient had escaped, and they didn't want to let us through until a search had been made for her.

The next day Philip wrote me that he'd heard I was the runaway, and he'd heard also that I'd tried to commit suicide with a Ward 6 towel.

"Gee, that burns me up," I told Jo. "I've long been used to being gossiped about on the outside with or without justice—but in here, under lock and key, I felt sure that was one annoyance to which I'd be immune."

"Imagine committing suicide with one of those towels," marveled Jo. "You can't get one of the things around your arm to dry it, let alone around a throat!"

Philip had copied a poem for us, that he'd found in a magazine.

PRAYER FOR LAUGHTER

Dear Lord, to preserve my sanity
Midst chaos which threatens to swallow me
Help me, no matter what ill-fate brings
To look for the funny side of things.
Help me above all else to keep
My sense of humor when I would weep.
Let not my fellow-man cause distress
Lord, make me realize their funniness.
Help me to find the humor in pain
That throbs all day in my tired brain
(Too keep me constantly well-aware
Of the brain's oft-doubted presence there!)
Send me a hearty laugh to calm
My quivering nerves with its magic balm—
And when Death comes with a lugubrious mien
O Lord, may I chuckle with mirth serene—
That a dour old spook as dread as he
Should be the means of releasing me!

We all felt that summed up our present thoughts on life.

The next day for the first and last time, I stayed home from work because of illness. I had to go to breakfast since staying in bed was not permitted save on sick bay, but our charge nurse shut her eyes to my returning to the dormitory to lie down afterward. It was impossible to sleep because our dormitory detail of four women were busy cleaning, but I bandaged my eyes against the sunshine and huddled there, luxuriating in misery. Beds scraped, polishing blocks clattered.

I chilled suddenly. I had forgotten for the brash moment that of the four women working there, two hated alcoholics, me in particular, with a terrifying intensity—and—they were insane.

But womanlike, they attacked with their tongues, carrying preposterous tales behind my back. Cottontop was going home that morning, and I left the dormitory to say goodbye to her. When I returned to bed, there was some incomprehensible fuss being made about a few pillows that had been mysteriously toppled over. The nuts told me that "that thief Cottontop was responsible," but they told the attendants that I had done it. Such a childish gesture as knocking over pillows might have occurred to me in a moment of exuberance, but I'd scarcely leave a sick bed to commit mayhem on the cots.

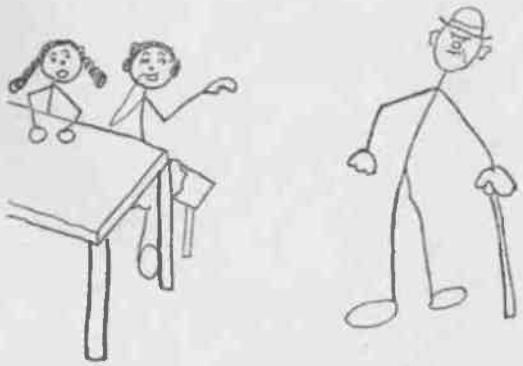
All day I had to hear these crazy old ladies disparage poor Cottontop—safely out of all this now. The "thief" appellation was occasioned by Cottontop and Ellen swapping a dress each, before she left. The old women, who made it

their business to know every tiny event on the ward, had seen her pack a dress they had always known belonged to Ellen.

They insisted righteously the State should have searched her luggage.

All this made illness too trying for me. I resolved to stagger to work in the future.

At supper time, a group of visitors was conducted through the cafeteria. This not infrequent occurrence always aroused sullen fury in us. We'd stop eating, put down our spoons and sit tensely until the gawking, pitying tourists had gone. This time a curious old man with a Vandyke beard, evincing horrified interest in our table, lagged back from the departing guide. Glancing at Jo, I saw the reason. With an imbecilic expression on her face, she was waving at him, winking and leering outrageously.



"Winking and Leering Outrageously"

The mental patients' complaints about the bounty and fun at our table had not abated, so

after a conference we decided to move to the rear of our mealtime lineup. This put us at a table far from the men's side, and away from the crabbiest women. Our attendants heard of this appeasement program with relief. Being at the end of the lineup when we left the dining room perforce brought me to a halt by the dishwashers' room while one nurse began her customary counting of noses at the front door. This gave the "soldier" a chance to rush up to me and explain that the Sioux and Apaches had been subdued.

"How about the Seminoles?" I enquired, boredly.

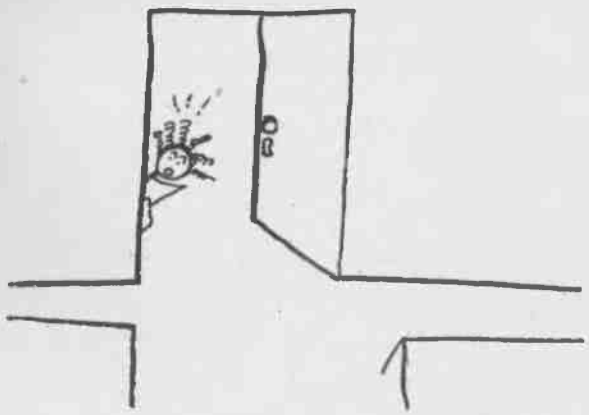
"Aye, aye, we'll get them!" he barked, saluting me. Just then our charge attendant grasped me by the arm, marched me down to the middle of the line, and thrust me unceremoniously between two old ladies in the middle of the ward lineup.

On the way home I began to tremble violently from one of my rare rages. I felt I'd been a better than fair patient. Being without court parole, I'd gotten into less than a tenth of the mischief as the rest of my gang; moreover, it had been my idea to give up our advantageous front table in order to quell gossip. So I felt I was being selected unjustly to bear the brunt of our attendant's censure. The fact that I was very fond of this charge nurse, made her seizure of me doubly humiliating. I hadn't encouraged the darned screwball to come talk to me, and now hundreds of people in the dining room had seen me summarily ejected from a position in line that I'd assumed solely for the purpose of minimizing disorder. And worst of all, since

I'd never proved intractable, she didn't have to drag me as though I were a refractory child. That hurt my pride.

Jo practically had to carry me into the ward. because of my trembling and because I was blinded by angry tears. Against all the girls' advice I sought out the charge nurse to protest. But I was so upset that I wept and stuttered and made a complete fool of myself. The one thing never won by a patient at Camarillo is an argument.

And now the "heat" was really on. We were split up at meal times (although, happily, Jo and I were permitted to eat together still) and we were disbanded at night. I drew, of course,



"The Disturbed Dormintory"

the disturbed dormitory; Jo, the anile dormitory; Ellen, the untidy one; while "Junior" stayed in the best room with Letty and Elise and

the other nice girls from sick bay detail. Mine was the worst break. One never knew when some little private hell would break out in my dormitory; Jo's was full of withered old ladies who snored and permitted no talking after eight at night. Ellen, the twenty-two year old I-A, did a lot of complaining. And with more than a little justice; her boudoir contained Ward 6's untidy patients—which meant that all night long attendants had to charge in and out reminding various addlepates that they'd best visit the section.

We were all now thoroughly miserable. No longer did we get extra food. So closely were we watched the men found it impossible to place snacks on our chairs. I lost sixteen pounds in my last three weeks there, not so much because of my inability to eat the institution food, but because of the terrific nerve strain of wondering if I'd be freed on schedule.

The concensus of opinion was that the last two weeks were the hardest. But for me the whole last month transcended Sherman's definition of war. When someone spoke to me, I'd jump, and toward the end, Jo had almost to lead me to eat and to bed and to work, as I couldn't think for myself. She would wonder aloud gloomily who would take care of her when her time came, as she had some weeks to do yet.

Because of our enforced separation at meals, we now spent most of our time huddling together on the section floor, playing ragged bridge and muttering imprecations on the hospital.

"I've always liked my own sex, and had a lot of women friends," I grumbled, "but when I get

out of here, I'm going to apply at the nearest monastery so I'll never have to see another skirt!"

The section was an unpleasant place to foregather, because the cracked inmates have the weirdest conception of personal hygiene. We tried to keep our collective gaze averted from the curved fountains where, at almost any hour of the day, one would see the darndest things being washed. The nurses tried to discourage this, and once we saw quite a spattering free-for-all when an enraged attendant dived at a nut who was using the fountain as a bird bath.

"I wish I had her on Ward 4 for a few minutes!" growled the nurse, which caused us to deduce that no holds are barred in that stronghold of mania. Our regular attendants knew that on our "good" ward, a certain amount of latitude was permissible for the patients, such as allowing them to enter the clothesroom to select their own garments, or letting the shoeroom stay unlocked all day, but relief nurses, used to completely untrustworthy patients, were so strict as to make our lives miserable. They wouldn't allow us a sheet to wrap around our shoulders while having our hair dressed, and other trifling denials that did not make for comfortable living. Most attendants consistently forgot that Ward 6 was our home, and because it was our home we should be given a certain amount of leeway in it.

I borrowed some prohibited tweezers from the gang's supply of taboo articles. We never felt guilt at breaking these rules, because we knew the rules applied originally to insane persons who might have suicidal tendencies, and we

were as careful as the most conscientious nurse not to let them fall into the hands of irresponsible patients. Tweezers, of course, are not very dangerous, but they are forbidden, along with matches and scissors and medicines personally carried.

Slipping into a small dormitory section, I stood on the toilet in order to take advantage of the last fading daylight while I used the tweezers. A new attendant caught me there, and from my unconventional stance and furtive manner, she was convinced I was attempting to

"My Unconventional Stance"

escape. Looking at the stoutly grilled window, she shook her head pityingly and walked out.

I know she felt my chart contained the wrong diagnosis.

Those last weeks!

It would be terrible to be a sufferer of claustrophobia in Camarillo. The hospital is, of course, fireproof, but to be locked in nightly with thirty plain and fancy assorted nuts is trying enough.

Fear of this new dormitory, however, was overshadowed by the fear instilled in me by recent hospital gossip. Rumors flew so swiftly around the place, I was terribly afraid I might not be released. One rumor had it that alcoholics would be kept, starting July the first, two years. Conviction grew in me that if I were held, my chart would have to be changed, as well as my ward. I knew I'd be ready for Ward 4 and a camisole.

The woman on my right in this new dormitory seemed to be always re-fighting the Civil War. Nightly I heard about the southern soldiers hanging the northern.

Everyone in the room carried on a feverish conversation with herself. When Jo paused in the doorway to say goodnight, I pretended to be having my own little soliloquy, and she enjoyed the tableau.

The woman directly across, however, had the best system. She was forever deep in spirited arguments with her husband. I ventured to inquire how he and she had arranged this.

"Oh," she said, airily, and with smug complacence, "He has installed a wire here so we can talk."

I dropped asleep wishing Ricky could arrange such an uxorious device.

CHAPTER XVII

When we were called from the laundry to have visitors, it was equivalent to an obstacle race. First the visitors would have the front office notify the correct ward. Then an attendant, as soon as she was free to leave, would walk the long distance to the laundry to escort the patient.

Patient and escort couldn't go straight from work to the visitors' room—that would be too easy. It was necessary to batter on a courtyard door until an attendant inside heard and unlocked it. Then one must step over dozens of yammering squirrel-bait rolling in the yard for "exercise" and be unlocked into the home ward. Once there, the charge attendant's heart would be broken unless one changed from State clothes into a costume considered more suitable for social activities—and how impervious buttons and shoelaces could be then to one's distraughtly fumbling fingers.

When garbed to the maternal nurse's approval, the excited patient and omnipresent attendant began another long and maddening journey A door was unlocked, a foyer crossed,

more keys employed in entering Ward 5. Traversing this ward brought one up short against the locked door of sick bay. Once through sick bay, another door must be unlocked into the patio, and when at long last the patio was behind, nothing intervened between the patient and company except one final door, sometimes fortuitously unlocked.

Ricky always maintained he expected to grow a long grey beard during these waits.

Any mention of beards A. C. (after Camarillo) calls to mind an oddity very prevalent in the hospital—bearded women. I used to wonder: can it be that there is outside of institutions, such a large percentage of bearded women in

"Dames Just Look in a Mirror and Go Quietly Mad"

the world—women who, with razors and depilatories, conceal their hirsute disfigurements? Or is it a phenomenon of derangement, possibly

glandular? Do females grow beards because they are crazy, or do they go crazy because they grow beards?

I guess these bewhiskered dames just look in a mirror and go quietly mad.

Mother and Ricky had come to see me, bringing all manner of welcome presents. Mother's fried chicken and magazines and cigarettes I accepted gratefully, but Ricky was to be as feared in the role of Santa as a Greek bearing gifts. His contribution was a large cellophaned package of dried lima beans. Everything brought into the hospital must be checked, and the head matron, on inspecting the beans, gave Ricky such a long, speculative stare that I know she was considering calling in for consultation one of the psychosis-minded medicos knocking about the place.

(Ricky wouldn't have minded if it had been Dr. Browne.)

The men patients in Dr. Browne's care considered her authority a mixed blessing. One of the favorite hospital stories was of John, a kitchen-working I-A, and his first encounter with her.

He was nervously awaiting his physical exam, clutching his trouser-band, from which the sustaining belt had been removed. A pretty slip of a girl entered the room, nodded pleasantly, and told him to hold out his hands.

"Naw," said the uncomfortable John. "Muh pants will fall down."

"Hold out your hands!" inexorably commanded the young woman.

"No," yelped the frantic John. I'm waiting for this guy Browne to get here."

"I'm Dr. Browne," said the youngster, sweetly. "Now will you hold out your hands, or do I do it for you?")

Privileges flew from me as leaves in the wind. We were told I could not eat lunch in the patio with company, as most patients were permitted to do. I returned to the ward, crying, and there encountered the doctor. After a minute's conversation with her, she relented, even to the extent of saying I could eat outside in the car, because my little niece was along and children are not permitted to visit inside. When I, transformed, had rejoined my family, mother sought an interview with Dr. Tompkins.

While Ricky and I were waiting in the car, a wacky female with ground parole shambled up, peered long and earnestly at him, then wandered away, shaking her head.

"That's funny," we heard her mutter, "her husband doesn't look a bit like her!"

The next visitors to the car were Philip and his family. He was being discharged from the hospital that day. After general introductions and some snapshot taking, I told Philip I would kiss him goodbye, were I not afraid Dr. Lafferty might see us.

"To hell with Lafferty!" said Phil, and he bussed me soundly. Ricky's eyebrows collided but he made no comment.

Mother returned, fuming, from her interview. The doctor had told her that for twenty months following my release I would not be permitted to work in any establishment where liquor was served, nor could I so much as enter a home that contained liquor. At one and the same time this took away my livelihood and restricted my

social activities. Since I was not supposed to consort with anyone who took a drink it left me for companionship the single teetotalar I know, my uncle. And even then my uncle and I would have to foregather on a street corner someplace, for my aunt frequently kept a little bottle of rye in the medicine cabinet.

"I'm to be viewed somewhat like a school building," I mused, "no liquor within fifteen hundred feet."

The doctor had told mother that she had been glad to see me cry, as heretofore I had seemed callous.

"They are certainly safe in allowing you visitors 'daily'," said mother. "This is a long and expensive trip. I'm sorry we won't be able to get up again before the eighth and sorry we've been able to come so few times. But cheer up, it's almost over."

"I hope," I amended her remarks fervently.

After I had reluctantly waved them farewell, I fell to musing about my whole strange experience as an inmate Mother's resentment against Camarillo had always struck me as ironic, considering my presence there was due to her planning. I'd conquered my first bitterness toward her, though, knowing she had meant well and that I'd given her ample reason to take drastic measures. One of my regrets was that I'd not been committed just before a spell of instability, instead of after, when many months of normalcy lay ahead in which I could have been gainfully employed. Camarillo didn't even offer me an exclusive pause of four months for reflection on the error of my ways, as I cogitated at length about that on the outside.

If the Staff conscientiously sought an answer to the alcoholic problem, they had within their grasp a wealth of material for research; should they find a solution, they'd rid the world of a scourge as great as the white plague. Furthermore, I'm confident most alcoholics would welcome any sincere attempt to rid them of their bete noir. I would have signed myself in Camarillo, if I'd been told there was aid, but I knew what they prescribed, hard work and contumely. Undoubtedly work is a panacea, but I did plenty of it on the outside. As for the contempt, no amount of scorn heaped upon a drinker equals the vilification he gives himself, in his innermost thoughts.

A few people drink from obvious reasons—physical disabilities or deformities. These people could be helped by medicine, plastic surgery or orthodontia. For example, I met there a male alcoholic whose teeth were so hideous and protruding, they must have made his social existence a nightmare of self-consciousness. Had the hospital's dentist improved his appearance, he might have faced life a new man, gaining better employment in the bargain But no help of this type was forthcoming, much less help for the average drinker's more involved psychological ills.

Years before, when I at last perceived I was one of those unfortunates who have no desire to drink, shudderingly refuse to even taste of it until some mysterious cycle within self has passed, and then drink heavily for days, I tried to fight it intelligently. I consulted a psychiatrist. This might have been helpful had I not lost faith in him after five minutes of conversa-

tion. He was a local leading light in his line, too, testifying expensively and mystifyingly in most of the gorier Los Angeles murder trials. His interest in my problem evaporated as rapidly as my faith, upon his ascertaining the depleted state of my finances.

Next I tried religion, but the skepticism that has burned strongly within me since childhood caused me to reject this, regretfully.

One of the funniest of my attempts at self-cure involved hynotism. One night I was discussing the problem with a young man, a friend of many years' standing. My faith in this boy was and is, absolute. I would trust him with my capital, if any, and my reputation, ditto. His regard for me was true enough to warrant a sincere wish for my ultimate victory. He asked if I'd thought of trying hypnotism I gazed at him in bewilderment.

"You'd be amazed at the interest doctors are showing in hypnotism," he assured me. "When I was working at Johns Hopkins I saw many interesting experiments with it, including a painless childbirth. Hypnotism is not one of the psuedo-sciences. It is entirely possible for a trained hypnotist to place a person in a deep sleep. It is believed that the subconscious mind is then most receptive to suggestion. In your case, possibly someone could sufficiently implant a dread of drinking into your mind while you were in such a trance. It might be effective for a considerable time and could then be repeated!"

"With your Svengali eyes, you'd make a good hypnotist!" I laughed. (Al is an Italian, with the dark eyes of his race.)

"I've hypnotized people," he admitted. "But

eyes are not considered the best means nowadays. Doctors use rotating silver balls to hold the subject's gaze."

"Would you try me?" I asked. I was willing to try anything to conquer enslavement—anything up to and including voodoo charms.

He agreed, asking me to lie on the couch and keep my eyes fixed on the overhead light, while he seated himself behind the head of the couch, out of my view.

Few people would I trust to this extent—not even Ricky. Too many of my friends have a warped sense of humor, and should they succeed in getting me hypnotized might think it funny to make me do the ridiculous imitations and gestures vaudeville hypnotists inflict upon their victims. But Alessio is always earnest of purpose and completely trustworthy, so I did his bidding without reservation. He began gently to stroke my forehead and speak monotonous phrases in a soothing tone.

"You are very sleepy—you are getting sleepier—you are asleep."

A torpor stole over my body. Al and I should have known my system would do things backwards, however. My mind never relaxed a second. Al did not know this, and when a short time later he pulled back an eyelid and my eyes did not immediately focus, he decided I was completely "under".

"Why do you drink?" he asked then, gently. I experienced great difficulty in answering, barely being able to force words from my lips although my brain seemed to be racing. Al discovered soon after this that every one of my bodily manifestations had been remarkably re-

tarded—respiration decreased, pulse almost indiscernible, in fact, no perceptible life save for my slow speech.

"Destiny," I mumbled. At that time I had the defeatist attitude that I was doomed to drink periodically.

"Whom do you love?" he asked next.

"Sister," I articulated, painfully. Al had known my sister so he said next:

"If you revere your sister's memory, you will never again take another drink. If you drink again, you will become deathly ill. The next drink will not stay down—" and so on, in much the same vein for several minutes. Again he examined an eyeball and it focused plainly.

"You aren't hypnotized, Billie!" he exclaimed.

"I know it, Al," I confessed, "but I can't move!"

"You're joking!"

"Honestly I can't—I've been trying to move an arm or a leg for a long time and nothing will budge but my mouth."

He saw I was telling the truth and, knowing more about hypnosis than I did, he became badly frightened. I was having a swell time enjoying his discomfiture and the sensation of being bodiless was grand. Not in years had I felt so airy, free from pain and nervousness.

Al assured me, over my protests, that I had to snap out of it. The poor boy had a greenish pallor. Obviously, he was wondering whether to go for help or not. Then it was he examined my pulse, temperature and respiration. I've never seen anyone look so alarmed. He slapped my arms and legs, shook me, and implored me to co-operate. He told me I must get on my feet

and walk before he would leave me. As I was living alone at the time, I protested, mindful of Mrs. Grundy. I saw he meant it, however, and redoubled my efforts to rise After half an hour I could waveringly stand. When he left I was laughing at him, and suggested that next time he seat himself at the other end and start his hypnotizing at my feet.

"There isn't," he assured me fervently, "gonna be a next time!"

The next morning I still felt loopy, and coffee and a cigarette tasted odd!

From all this it can be concluded that my resentment at commitment was not because I did not want help—but because I received none at Camarillo. It was a waste of money and time for me. Relatives are prone to believe the State hospital helpful because patients invariably gain weight. This is not surprising when the mainstay of the diet there is lima beans. Also, I felt a certain stigma, although the Staff insists this is a wrongful attitude. Well, the doctors didn't have my friends. Many of the good people I know will say, "So Billie was in Camarillo, huh? She may say she was in on an alcoholic charge, but she was probably temporarily twirly from beer!"

But I wasn't to get away from the old school without sampling one more of their ways of making whoopie.

There had been a great deal of activity around the hospital because of a Fourth of July celebration. In the reception room I found a program. These programs were not meant, of course, for the patients. Later Jo and I studied it.

"Good Lord," said Jo, "these patients go for

months with no excitement and here is an arduous day planned. At nine in the morning, a Grand March, then all manner of stunts and races. Music, speeches, a ball game, and at night a dance. Half the joint will be disturbed by nightfall. I wonder if they'll let you go to this dance? What with you and Junior and Joan being kept away from the last one, Jake told me his whole ward wanted to know what had become of the glamour girls from Ward 6."

"I don't quite like that Grand March idea," I replied. Since that parade ground has always been forbidden to me especially, I don't like to get out there and march with a bunch of lackwits for the benefit of a flock of visitors the Staff will bring, but I understand all of us able-bodied nuts have to do it."

The great day dawned and we marched. Some of the remarks made by the mental patients anent Old Glory and the freedom the flag stood for were terse, to the point, and completely unprintable.

When the men and women marching swung together, I drew for a partner a negro who seemed to have a slight touch of locomoter ataxia. Jo, per usual, rallied me. She began mincing around, twirling a flag in flawless drum majorette fashion She was so funny and clever my good humor was restored.

The "greased pig" event wound up with between twenty and thirty male lunatics hurling themselves at once on a medium sized, panicky porker. Jo and I seemed to be the only persons present who saw anything wrong with this. As the pig's agonized screams came from below the great heap of men, we hid our faces and held

hands tightly. The day was spoiled for us, and even being allowed to go to the dance failed to relieve our misery.

With Phil gone and Outgoing Staff facing me the next day, the dance had lost all significance, but I went regardless, to say goodbye to the many friends I'd made in the hospital; mental patients, attendants and alcoholics that were not on our ward, whom, therefore, I might miss seeing again.

A surprising number of doctors were at the dance, and as I had nothing to lose, I went straight to headquarters and asked Dr. Lafferty if the women might smoke after the dance. He graciously assented, and this dance was made memorable by two reasons—refreshments and a cigarette. On the way home I thanked the night matron for the privilege. She didn't know me, and replied I shouldn't expect such freedom after each dance. I didn't explain that I hoped to be gone long before the next hop.

Jo really fixed me up at breakfast time My pockets were burdened with rabbits'-feet, four-leafed clovers, and, almost, a horseshoe. She had failed in her attempt to purloin one from the men's horseshoe throwing court.

When a nut got disturbed in the dining room and wailed like a banshee, my unnerved condition approached complete collapse.

"The hearty man ate a condemned breakfast," murmured Jo, observing my palsied fingers fumbling with the unpalatable fare.

Leaving the dining hall, I passed near a young woman from another ward. She tossed me a note of farewell and it fell short. An attendant

picked it up, and although the girl told her what it was, the attendant put it in her own pocket, wearing the while such a sour look as to bode no good for the napless girl who had thus broken a rule. Every petty thing about the place had us ready to scream. But all such trifles, onerous though they were, paled before our grief at Gloria's death.

The girl had found the parole job too strenuous, and had crept back to sick bay, where she lingered but a short time before her laboring heart abandoned its painful beating We who had known her fear of dying in a madhouse were sick with grief.

The unpleasantly familiar sights and sounds and smells of short hall fitted, therefore, into my despondent mood when I waited there to be called into Staff meeting. The young attendant supervising our lineup talked very freely with me. She claimed she would never be able to understand the commitment of alcoholics to such institutions.

"I have a kid sister who drinks far too much," she confessed, "but none of us would dream of sending her here. If need be, I'd quit my job first and stay home and care for her myself."

And then I was led into the fateful room. The Staff gazed at me with the startled disdain usually reserved for entomological specimens found in the soup. It was well that I didn't know at the time that Dr. Tompkins had written my mother telling her not to come to the hospital on the eighth with any idea of taking me home.

"Do you know you are here for two years, Wilma?" asked she.

Numbly, I gazed at her. "I know the sentence is four months to two years."

"It's not a 'sentence'; it is a commitment," she corrected me, "and it is up to two years at the doctor's discretion."

What could I reply?

"What about all these rules you've been breaking?" she asked next. Being my ward doctor, she did most of the questioning.

"I ate lunch in a place that sold beer," I enumerated, "and you thought I was writing in code, and I received a letter from a discharged patient, and that's all."

"All!" she exclaimed. "Isn't that enough?"

I had received a letter from Philip, and a very nice one from his brother, thanking me for dissuading Philip from escaping. The doctor had left word I might read them, but they must then be turned in to her. She may have had the right to intercept my mail from Philip, a discharged patient, but certainly she had no jurisdiction over my mail from his brother, who had never been committed. I had said nothing, but had been incensed.

Next the doctor took up the matter of my "callousness and flippancy". Hampering tears of frustration crept into my eyes and voice. I fought for control. that I might articulate clearly.

"Doctor Tompkins," I pleaded, "I'm not flippant, down deep. This facetiousness is an armour I've worn for years to hide sensitiveness. It would be hard to find, I believe, a person who has given more steadfast thought to serious problems—" But my voice failed, and through

a mist I realized the meeting was over and I was being led from the room.

Home on Ward 6, I pulled myself together enough to detail the meeting to Mrs. Read. She was baffled.

"I don't understand the doctor intimating you might have to stay two years. I've never known such a case."

"Two years would cure me of drinking," I replied bitterly, "and it would cure me of all else, too. I'd be sitting on the floor of the section making dolls of toilet paper, like some of your other prizes."

Just then the phone gave its tiny ward tinkle. Mrs. Read spoke into it briefly, then turned to me with a beaming face.

"You can stop crying," she said. "You're going home. That was the order to pack your clothes."

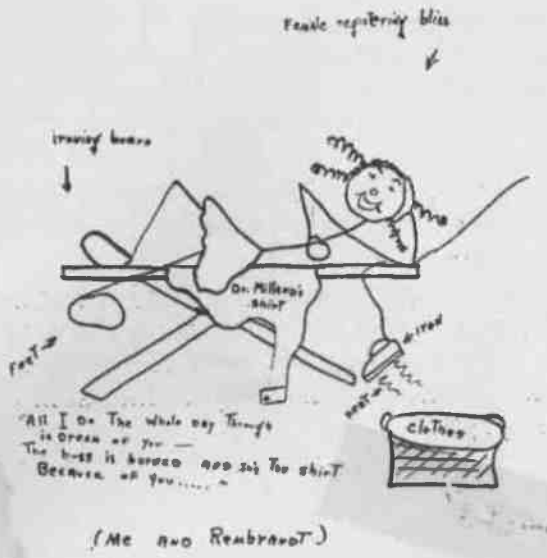
The next three days were befogged with joy. I was useless at the laundry, but Mrs. LeBrun blandly overlooked my capers.

"How is it going to feel to carry matches and money again?" asked a man alcoholic.

"Money?" I echoed, blankly. "I forgot what it looked like long before Camarillo. I turned in so many empty beer bottles for full ones I came to consider bottles legal tender."

"Are you going to leave me that package of lima beans your boy-friend brought?" Jo asked. "I can make bean bags out of them and have something to play with after you're gone."

"No, I'm not going to leave you the beans. After I'm married I'm going to cook those beans —without salt—and make him eat every one."



"An Ironing Board to Daydream of"

I curled up on an ironing-board to daydream of such a rapturous time.

"No one leaves till the scissors are found," called Mrs. LeBrun. This was a familiar cry and signified the closing of the working day. We were usually anxious to reach the ward and mail. Since the doctor had taken to confiscating my letters, I was loath these days to hear I'd received any. Phil had made so many incriminating remarks in the confiscated letter about notes and smuggled food, that I am now permanently allergic to the postman's whistle.

Sure enough, there was a letter from him and the usual instruction to read it and leave it for

the doctor. She had caught me with my —— I mean she had caught me napping before. This time I marked the envelope's flap with an indelible pencil: "Tell Dr. Tompkins to return this to the sender or to give it to me unopened upon my departure," I instructed Mrs. Read.

I got the letter back a day later, its indelible blurred in one corner.

Being now considered one of the sweet girl graduates, I felt free to beg a dispensation: "May I bathe tonight instead of in the morning before I leave?" I begged the nurse. This was granted, and the dials of the elaborate shower system adjusted. This, of course, was another thing patients weren't allowed to do for themselves. It seemed luxurious beyond belief to have the big room to myself, and to take my time. Jo came to supervise.

"When I get home," I told her, "I'll have to invite all the neighbors in to bathe with me, so I won't feel strange. Do you realize I've taken off a state dress for the last time?"

"You hope," Jo gave the inevitable supplement. All alcoholics there had nightmares of drinking again and being brought back, nightmares that came true all too often. People committed from Los Angeles County had a twenty month parole, those from Ventura County a two month parole, Santa Barbara people had a five month parole—each county having a different commitment, which was one of the inconsistencies resented by the patients. A familiar plaint was:

"Wisht I'd got drunk in Ventura!"

"You'll turn pale every time you see a policeman," predicted Jo.

"Oh, the clutches of the law are familiar to me," I confessed. "My dog hates cops and his nips at them are forever bringing me citations. Furthermore, in my salad days I drove a car that had a bell under its hood that sounded just like an intersection bell. It was my unnatural humor to ring this bell twice at main corners and watch everyone start out against the signal while perspiring cops attempted to fathom the tangle.

"But perhaps my worst run-in with the law occurred when my dog was stolen from me. When I learned who had him, I went there and insisted he be given back to me. Unfortunately, I was quite blotto, so the thieving gent who had my dog called the police, who took me to night court. The judge was awfully sweet when I told him there were extenuating circumstances. Therefore I can't understand the sudden change in his attitude."

"What were the extenuating circumstances?" asked the judge, kindly.

"Well," sez I. "I went to see a man about a dog 'n—"

"Ten dollars or one day!" screamed Hizzoner.

"You'll be back here," laughed Jo.

"I don't think so, dear," I replied, "unless it's for dementia praecox. I've a couple of more systems to try, to lick drinking. Next time I crave liquor, I can knock myself out with sleeping potion, or make myself ill with ipecac. Either way I'd be too busy to think of alcohol. I'll beat this habit yet." On this cheerful note we marched off to see the last Western movie I'd have to view.

At bedtime I found Jo had sewn the arms of my nightie tightly together. That was all right. If I'd had my way, I would not have bothered to go to bed. Sleep was impossible with the dawn bringing freedom.

As much as I disliked Camarillo, and futile as I felt it to be for most alcoholics, still the place had taught me a great deal. No experience is ever fruitless. I was leaving behind me a great deal of youthful spontaneity, because one cannot view the suffering of the mindless for months unscathed. But if I were taking away with me additional tolerance and more of a grasp on sociological problems, I had benefited. The asylum, with its faults, still is preponderantly helpful. I do not know for whom I am pleading in these lines—it's quite a jumble. Nor do I know against whom my petty complaints have been directed. Not the mental patients. They have a heart-breaking problem. Nor the alcoholics. They have a problem, too, not so agonizing to be sure, but still a very real battle. The attendants? So many of them are patient, understanding and kindly, under trying circumstances. The doctors? Harried, overworked men and women, beset on all sides by palpably spurious tales of woe.

The State? California is groaning under her burden of indigents and their concomitant expense. So what? Am I agitating for any reform? Yes, to this extent: the psychopathic boards should be compelled to explain to patients' families, or to self-committed alcoholics, the duration of commitment and its cost, and the fact that such a patient needs a guarantor to sign his release. More than one patient has

signed himself in, only to learn later to his dismay, he can't get out, because he hadn't arranged for someone to sign the release.

It should be explained to alcoholics that there is no "cure" given at these institutions beyond detention and labor.

The civil service requirements should be more stringent, to insure having attendants of equable temperament and insight into psychological problems. Patients who work and pay should not be treated with contempt. For that matter, should indigent patients be thus treated?

Basically, this is all the age-old problem—lack of brotherly love and education.

Fortunately for a certain ex-patient's peace-of-mind, this same ex-patient does not expect a profoundly moved State to take cognizance of her reflections.

THE END

"Certified Sane"